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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet provides suggestions for teachers for using creative dramatics in the classroom. The contents include: "Dr. Edwin Land Considers the Nature of Creativity"; "Six Basic Principles for Using Creative Dramatics with All Children," which discusses tuning in the senses, listening and recording, pantomime, rhythms and movement, presenting a story, discussion and constructive criticism, and justification for planning creative dramatics in the school week; "Twenty Resources for Creative Dramatics," which presents resources in the areas of creative spirit and creative dramatics; "Creative Dramatics When English Is a Second Language," which discusses a program for working with children for whom English is a second language; "Creative Dramatics with the Emotionally Disturbed," which presents a program that includes motivation, pantomime, sound, touch, and creative play; and "Creative Dramatics with the Brain Injured," which discusses a program for initiating creative dramatics with brain-injured children. (WR)

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Creative Dramatics for All Children

By Emily Gillies

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Author's Notes

My friend Walter C. Alvarez, M.D., father of psychosomatic medicine, once drew my attention to the origin of the word enthusiasm: *en + theos*, "a God in you." Without this kind of enthusiasm—seeing the God in every child—a person should not teach. With this kind of enthusiasm, one may become the teacher of a child who will help change a broken community, a broken heart or even a broken world.

It is the rarest blessing if a person has one great teacher in life. I had two. The first, Winifred Ward, came into my life when I was thirteen, her student in a creative dramatics class in the Evanston, Illinois public schools. Some years later, my work with her at Northwestern University School of Speech led me to New York University's graduate school —to Hughes Mearns whose convictions about creative ways of working with children had so excitingly helped shape Winifred's landmark work in educational drama

You will see their concepts here on almost every page, combined with ideas of my own—methods into which I stumbled, fell or walked, since no material in print was applicable to many of the special children who came to me.

Emily Gillies

Dr. Edwin Land* Considers the Nature of Creativity

"When I meet someone for the first time, often I can tell right away whether he may be a potential scientist. In talking to this person, how much is he ahead of you? When you draw a breath to say the next thing, does he know what you are going to say before you say it? Does he delight in the construction you are making? Does he turn the conversation quite subtly because he perceives where it is going and wishes it to go somewhere else? Not all scientists are that alert. There are many scientists who, for all their marvelous training, are just plain dull. You sit with them and nothing is happening. They have been stultified somehow and the world is going by them. . . .

An essential aspect of creativity is not being afraid to fail. Scientists made a great invention by calling their activities hypotheses and experiments. They made it permissible to fail repeatedly until in the end they got the results they wanted. In politics or government, if you made a hypothesis and it didn't work out, you had your head cut off. The first time you fail outside the scientific world you are through.

Many people are creative but use their competence in ways so trivial that it takes them nowhere. Their kind of creativity is not cumulative. True creativity is characterized by a succession of acts each dependent on the one before and suggesting the one after. This kind of cumulative creativity led to the development of Polaroid photography. One day when we were vacationing in Santa Fe in 1943 my daughter Jennifer, who was then 3, asked me why she could not see the picture I had just taken of her. As I walked around that charming town, I undertook the task of solving the puzzle she had set for me. Within the hour the camera, the film and the physical chemistry became so clear that with a great sense of excitement I hurried to the place where a friend was staying, to describe to him in detail a dry camera which would give a picture immediately after exposure. In my mind it was so real that I spent several hours on this description. Four years later we demonstrated the working system to the Optical Society of America . . . I learned enough about what would work in enough different fields to be able to design the camera and film in the space of that walk.

If you are able to state a problem—any problem—and if it is important enough, then the problem can be solved. Long before he puts the problem into words, the scientist knows how to confine his questions to ones that he thinks are answerable. He wouldn't be able to formulate them otherwise. His taste, discernment, wisdom, shrewdness and experience have established within him an inner knowledge of what is feasible. However, you must pick a problem that is manifestly important to you and your colleagues, and more important than anything else. You can't necessarily separate the important from the impossible. If the problem is clearly very important, then time dwindles and all sorts of resources which have evolved to help you handle complex situations seem to fall into place letting you solve problems you never dreamed you could solve."

* Inventor of the Polaroid Land camera, interviewed by Sean Callahan in Life magazine, October 27, 1972. Used with permission.

6/7/8/9/10

1

Tuning in the Senses

No one expects to figure skate, to ski, or even to hit a run to first base if he has never trained his muscles by degrees to do so. No one should expect to have an exhilarating experience in creative dramatics if he is not given a chance to practice a special kind of warming-up exercises which will make him ready to enter fully into this richly exciting activity. The best way to prepare a child for his later experiences in moving, acting, and speaking, is by encouraging him to open up all his senses to life around him. A teacher in one of my workshops once commented about eleven-year-old Jill, "This is a child completely open to life in every direction, all her senses open, so that all the excitement and wonder of the world come rushing in."[1]

This is exactly what teachers must try for—a whole room full of Jills. Some children arrive at our classroom doors too timid, fearful of making a mistake or even afraid to comment about their own ideas out loud.

The teacher may start with any one of the senses, but *hearing* is a marvelous place to begin, for nursery school children all the way through to adults.

"Boys and girls, let's close our eyes. Listen . . . listen carefully to all the sounds inside the room. Keep perfectly still . . . Good!" And as the silence deepens, "Listen to *every single sound* you can hear—until I tell you it's time to open your eyes."

Such an exercise timed for two or three minutes brings tumbling discoveries. We find we hear not only many of the same things, but that some persons hear one-of-a-kind sounds that others missed.

Another day: "We'll have five minutes to look at everything in our room. When the time is up, each person will make a list of each thing he's seen." "*Everything!*" some ask in shock, but later with zest as the fun progresses.

"Yes! And *you* may see something which no one else in this whole room has noticed!"

Or another day: "I'm going to pass some interesting objects around our circle for all of you to touch. As you each handle the object, whether it's a smooth silk scarf or a prickly pine-cone, just call out your own word to tell me how the object feels to your fingers—or how it makes *you* feel inside."

This kind of tuned-in, quiet, concentrated sharing with the children, respecting deeply each of their discoveries and carefully repeating their words exactly as they have said them, proves its immense worth again and again. For whichever of the child's senses of sight, touch, taste, smell or hearing are being expanded, extended or unfolded, each person is becoming more accessible to the other in this kind of direct sharing. In Paul Tillich's words, "It is an intimate seeing, a grasping and being grasped. It is a seeing shaped by love."[2]

[1] Gillies, Emily P. "The Things About New York." Washington, D.C.: *Childhood Education*, December 1964, p. 174.

[2] Tillich, Paul. *The New Being*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965, p. 129.

2

Listening and Recording

In creative drama, we have a different set of rules from any other part of the whole school program. Each class finds that in this unique slice of the day, there are no right and wrong answers. In creative drama *everyone's* ideas are important—not just one idea. One rule is supreme: the idea must be one's own, and someone else's answer or idea must not be copied or mindlessly repeated by another child.

The class has no competition such as exists when children participate in formal plays, because the usual audience for the dramatizing is the teacher. There are no lines to memorize, no costumes, make-up or scenery unless improvised fragmentarily and spontaneously. Each student is working to honor the other's suggestions, building on them to let the planning, dramatization and positive criticism of our efforts move the class forward into a growing whole. We are in dramatized form what Edwin Land described: "True creativity is characterized by a succession of acts each dependent on the one before and suggesting the one after."

All this would be impossible if we could not learn to listen . . . not just each child to each child, but the teacher to each child, and the child to the teacher, and the teacher to herself. The leader in creative drama must not only listen—she must learn unrelentingly to write down what she hears, for through the children's words she will begin to understand the meanings behind the voice of each child speaking, the whir of each mind thinking and working as no other mind has ever worked before.

Ten-year-old Tracy speaks aloud to me, thinking back over her year in creative drama. Reflectively she talks about the difference between the old kind of acting she knew about before her class began its first day in creative drama this year. She says:

"I never knew acting had such an easy way of working. I thought you had to read scripts just like reading someone else's words. And now we just say it ourselves and I think it's easier instead of someone writing it and *you* just saying it. It's YOU.

That's acting . . . with us. That's not acting . . . with anybody else.

Right here I found out acting *isn't* anybody else.

I thought acting took spotlights. That's one thing I've probably learned.

When you're in here it's not like sweating. It's like relaxing. I've learned how to relax and act. It's not like we have to dress all up like in a play—just being ourselves. *It's our own way of saying.*"

I write it exactly as Tracy tells this to me —then read it back just for her to hear, to her open-mouthed delight, because as she learns, she didn't know she "had said those things that way, exactly."

John, too, has his "own way of saying." Fresh from some dramatizing in his kindergarten class concerning plants, seeds and growing, he tells me with five-year-old intensity that when the seeds in the acting had "sprouted," he was a sunflower pushing up through the earth. Afterwards, pausing for a snack, he happens to nibble on some real sunflower seeds. He looks up, eyes enormous with sober wonder.

"I think I'm going INTO a sunflower!" he proclaims. I say back to him those words of becoming, so that he can hear his own wonderful thought, uniquely John's of any child's in the universe. When we listen long enough and deeply

enough, at last we slowly come to understand Kafka's words:

"Stay at your table and listen. . . . Be completely quiet . . . The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked . . . in raptures it will writhe before you." [1]

[1] Kafka, Franz, as quoted in *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1960, p. 240.

3

Pantomime, Rhythms and Movement

A day or two has passed for warming up, for tuning in our senses. We have begun not only to listen to each other a little better, but to hear more clearly. And now we are ready to act, to play, to create in movement. Where do we begin?

What is on the mind of the group? Is it the thrill of a first train ride into the city for a kindergarten class? The first snowfall for an impatient bunch of skiers from the junior high? The promise of a cook-out for a summer recreation program? Anything close to the hearts of the children can be material for dramatization. But it will spring into being far more quickly and believably if the children identify with and care deeply about something they are doing, drawn from their own experiences at the start. *Whatever it is, we begin by having every single person in the class participate in the same action at the same time.*

"Spread way out around the room so that every person has plenty of space to move in. Use the space all over the room, where nobody else is. And now in a moment I'm going to see you *each* put on your clothes to go skiing. In pantomime—with no words out loud at all! Ready? . . . Begin!"

Or to a nursery school group: "Everybody pick out the pretend pumpkin from this pile that you're going to carve for Hallowe'en. And show me how you're going to carry it right over to your own special corner to carve it. Is it huge and heavy? Bumpy? Tall and skinny? Show me by the way you carry it what shape it is. Everyone at the same time . . . now begin!"

Magnífico! Fantástico! Estupendo! Each time the initial command to move together is given to a group, whether to four-year-olds or 14-year-olds, it works. For no one is singled out, no one made to feel awkward or frozen or inept, when each person's identity is preserved intact, yet comfortably somehow submerged in the movement of the entire sea of bodies of which he is one small wave.

The teacher can add much to this initial effort in group pantomime by the use of a drum, a gong, or a bell. "Take a step each time you hear the drum beat." These words can free your mosaic of personalities to move more easily through these first unfamiliar moments. Carefully selected victrola records or excerpts of sounds or rhythms from tapes can often create an atmosphere, a feeling, a mood to which the group will respond in movement. For the youngest keep the directions simple, and the time span short for their first effort, being sure to praise them, no matter how unfinished or tentative this first venturing may be. For the goal is for the children to feel so successful that they will want to play again and again for longer periods of time, gradually dividing into smaller groups if they are older children.

Teachers skilled in rhythms or dance can use these first sessions combining pantomime with rhythms or body movement which is especially essential for the younger child; but she must keep in mind always that in the first few meetings no child can learn to move and talk at the same time. One must begin with the non-verbal. Confidence gained through success in pantomime or rhythms automatically prepares the way for success later in handling dialogue.

4

Presenting a Story

Whether the group is first catapulted into action by the thrill of playing a supermarket, a merry-go-round, or the exploration of a cave, eventually some child will ask, "When are we going to act out a story?" The time is right now, after their initiation into tuning in their senses, of establishing a quiet and listening atmosphere, and of learning something about pantomime, rhythms, or movement.

"Good! What would you like to act out?"

A furious discussion—perhaps even a fight—is likely to ensue. See p. 43 for a description of a class which insisted on so many unique ideas that finally a group plot was composed, fusing elements from *all* their selections. But oftentimes a group will more easily come to an accord, and a comfortable settling-in takes place on one story to dramatize. If it is an original kindergarten story dictated to the teacher, such as the beautiful and poetic "Maggie's Story" on p. 17, the process will be quite different, since very young children need to move with the teacher's voice, a drum, a piano, or a record often supporting them through most of the action. For the youngest children, a story idea well may be totally completed in a one-time playing. For grades three and older, however, the process becomes one which relies on careful planning and discussion. Whether using the role playing of a current event taken from a newspaper clipping for a junior high class, or excerpts from P. L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* for a lively fifth grade, the process is exactly the same.

1. First the leader must slowly *tell* the story, investing color and enthusiasm in the telling, helping the various characters in the action become vivid and real as he or she describes them. The telling aloud also establishes one version in the children's minds to which they will repeatedly return in the dramatization.

2. With the class's suggestions and help, the story must be divided into fairly short scenes, with thorough agreement as to where each scene begins and ends.

3. The first class session devoted to the story must include opportunities for group action—pantomime, rhythms, or movement built around a character or scene in the story. This might be everyone walking in the rain with umbrellas raised, as in "Maggie's Story" (see photograph, p. 17); or every single person, thirty Mary Poppinses at the same time in pantomime, removing wondrous contents from their magic carpet bags! The most successful first session ends on a high note with all involved—and wanting very much to come back for more the next time.

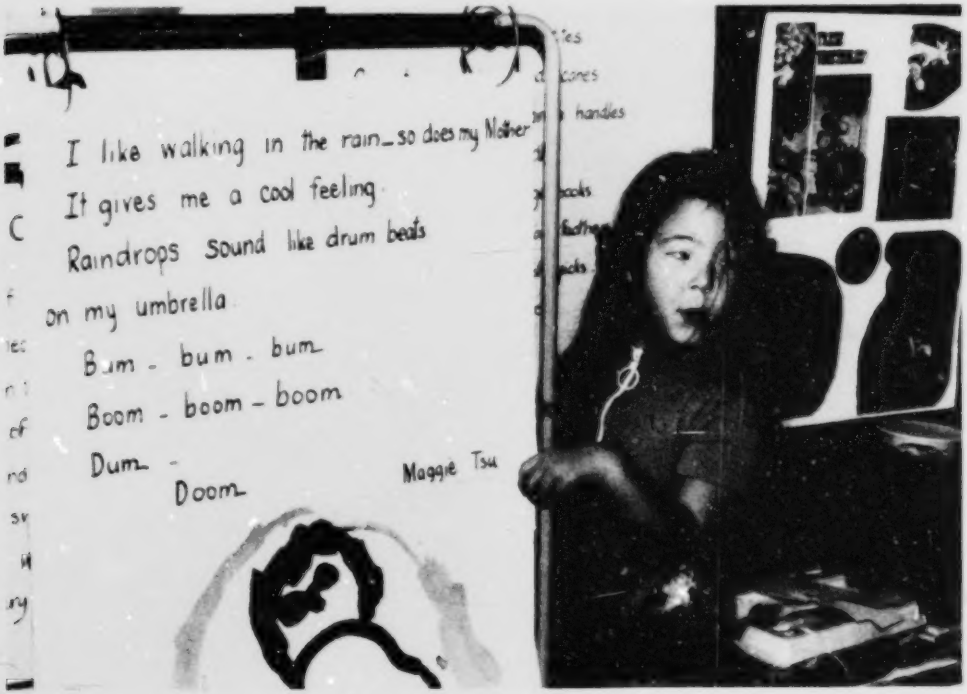
4. In the second meeting, the class should start by reviewing the earlier session, then planning for what can be covered today. *Begin again as a group in pantomime, all together acting the same character,* whether it is fair Goldilocks trying out various-sized chairs in Father Bear's house, or sixth graders pantomiming exploring the space beneath a trap door in a mystery one group created about its neighborhood.

5. Follow each playing with a short but carefully led discussion, planning with the group for the next small bit of action. Units will eventually grow longer. Be free to call "Curtain!" if the action runs too long, or if the students fail to keep the feeling sustained inside themselves of what they set out to do.

6. By the third or fourth session, allow the addition of dialogue. Up to this time encourage them to use only pantomime so that they can "keep in character"—retaining the authentic feel inside, feeling the character they are playing all the way deeply within. Only then are they ready for dialogue.

7. If a group is completely immersed in an idea or a plot over a period of time, it may benefit from inviting another class to watch its playing in the most informal way. If this happens, much can be learned from the group discussion that follows between the actors and the audience. The teacher handling the discussion must use the greatest care once more to guide the criticism along constructive lines. Otherwise the confidence she has been working to build can easily be shaken by students outside her class not used to participating in positive criticism.

Approached too fast, without the groundwork of early preparation and thoughtful planning, children are likely to produce wooden, embarrassing creations. Approached slowly and in mini-units, a creative dramatization will blossom, coming into being with conviction and authentic feeling.


I like walking in the rain_so does my Mother
It gives me a cool feeling
Raindrops sound like drum beats
on my umbrella
Bum - bum - bum
Boom - boom - boom
Dum -
Doom
Maggie Tsu

5

Discussion and Constructive Criticism

By now, some of the educators following these first meetings in creative drama may ask, "Well, what is so different about this, and what *I've* always done before when my children act?" One essential difference between most other kinds of informal drama, and creative dramatics, lies in the kind of discussion and constructive criticism following *each* playing by the group. Except for nursery school through first grade, this is a training of vital importance for all other age levels.

"Boys and girls, what did you see that you *liked* in that scene?"

Mark, agonized and impatient to play again immediately the elephant he has just dramatized in the jungle scene his class created, lashes out, "I didn't like the way Tony—"

"No, Mark." I cut in quickly, already seeing Tony's face contort into sunken disappointment. "That isn't the question I asked. What did you see that you *liked*?"

Destructive criticism diverted from him, Tony's face instantly brightens. Mark seems incapable of offering praise to anyone that day, but Bridget slowly offers, "I thought it was funny the way Willie growled like a tiger, an' tried to climb the tree."

And thus we are off to a beginning on which we will build constantly in every class. The discussion following each playing for second graders and older can become a powerful educational strength, a technique learned early, and applied the rest of their lives. "What did you notice that was interesting about the way Pinocchio moved in the scene when Geppetto finished carving him?" A question such as this can draw out critical appreciation for the difference between the way in which a puppet and a human being move. Or: "Who noticed someone in our group who hit that home run in pantomime the way a baseball player would do it in real life?" A question like this will sharpen all eyes to look for, and value, other instances of reality which they formerly had not realized were important.

Once trained to look for what is *good* or what they *like*, it is a very short distance for them to travel to the second level of discussion: "How can we make that scene better?" (or more true to life, more real, more exciting, more powerful, etc.) "What shall we add, or change, the next time we play it?" Something about the careful asking of questions, drawing the group into a creative appraisal, is endemic to the process Winifred Ward described in her definition of creative dramatics: "An inclusive expression designating all forms of improvised drama: dramatic play, story dramatization, impromptu work in pantomime, shadow and puppet plays, and all other extemporaneous drama. It is the activity in which informal drama is created by the players themselves."[1]

When "the players themselves" create this kind of drama shaped by a leader respectful of the power of each person in the group, and fired by serious discussion and positive criticism, creative drama stands its greatest chance of reaching the height for which it was conceived.

[1] Ward, Winifred. *Playmaking with Children, from Kindergarten Through Junior High School.* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957, p. 3.

6
A Child Who is Open

What, then, is our justification for planni. ; creative dramatics as one of the irreplaceable elements in a child's school week? Fifty years of experimenting in our field point the way to some impressive reasons: children who participate in creative drama learn that speaking aloud with ease and conviction, and interracting with others creatively, whether in a puppet show or a dance-drama, can bring deep satisfaction. This is true not only in the present, but in later life. Whether addressing the local school board on an issue of great importance in one's community, or the annual church meeting, the office meeting, or simply the meeting of one neighbor's mind with another, it is part of the same learned skill. Just as important is the early participation in, and the rejoicing over, the shared moments which are good. These are the moments in which it becomes the teacher's absolute responsibility to help establish that firm territory, our classroom in which no child will be afraid to fail.

"Remember the time—remember the time when that cardboard tree in our Indian story fell down, and Julius went right on talking in front of the tepee pretending he didn't even see it?" . . . "Remember the time when we were acting out that old-fashioned mel drama in eighth grade, and we had to ma up a whole new scene on stage when Ida Mae forgot to come in?"

The memory, not in derision and embarrassment, but in shared fun, of inventive solutions, the quick substitutions, the unexpected strengths we found ourselves uncovering in ourselves and in each other, the moment in which we ourselves truly and actually saved a scene and helped it continue by an improvised word or line or bit of pantomime . . . all these spell that kind of success which adds emotional stamina to a child. The willingness to try something harder which he has never before experienced, the ability to enter in without fear, and with a zest for trying the new, the daring, the part of life which will spring open a corner of the universe formerly invisible to him or to his mastery—the marvel of it!

Creative dramatics gives us a custom-made chance in our whole school curriculum to ask the "what if" questions. "What if Saint Paul had never traveled all over the Mediterranean, and what if Saint Luke had never been a doctor?" sixth grader Monty speculated one day during a dramatization concerning early missionaries. "You know," he added with a solemnity which fixed his statement in my mind for all time," . . . you know, *'if'* is history."

As Edwin Land tells us: "If you are able to state a problem—any problem—and if it is important enough, then the problem can be solved." If creative dramatics brings any child closer to that kind of problem-solving, in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in which he learns neither to fear ridicule or failure, then it will have all been worth it. For as the Jewish scholar Hillel tells us in Pirke Aboth of the *Talmud* in words that ring down the ages:

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

Twenty Resources for Creative Dramatics

ON THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

1. Cole, Natalie Robinson. *The Arts in the Classroom.* New York: The John Day Company, 1940 ($5.25).

A teacher of deprived Mexican, black, Chinese and white children in California frees the creative spirit within her classroom through a masterful use of the arts. The book does not cover dramatization.

2. ———————. *Children's Arts from Deep Down Inside.* New York: The John Day Company, 1966 ($6.00).

Mrs. Cole further develops her unique story of techniques used in her classroom. With many photographs of children's art work and insightful quotations of children's firsthand comments throughout.

3. Heffernan, Helen and Burton, William H. *The Step Beyond: Creativity.* Washington, D.C.: National Educational Association, 1964 ($1.00).

Clarifies basic principles of what's involved in nurturing creativeness in children, and offers a host of ways of feeding creativity throughout the curriculum.

4. Mearns, Hughes. *Creative Power.* 2nd revised edition. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958 ($2.50 paperbound).

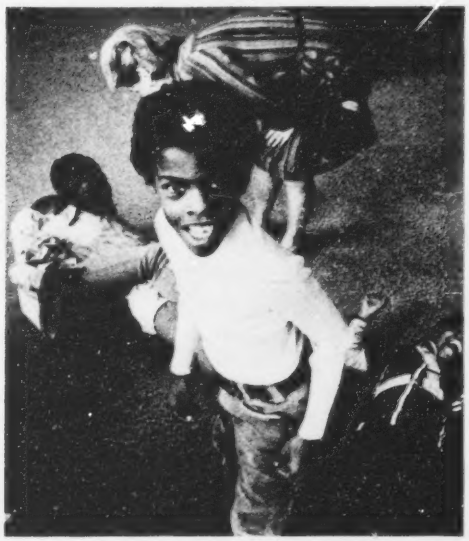
The record of the releasing of the creative spirit in children at The Lincoln and Horace Mann schools, New York, through creative writing. A classic not to be missed, which has fired the enthusiasm of several decades of teachers and which helped shape Winifred Ward's concept of educational drama.

ON CREATIVE DRAMATICS

5. Barnfield, Gabriel. *Creative Drama in Schools.* New York: Macmillan, 1971 ($10.00).
The story of work done in an evening dance-drama club, an outgrowth of St. George's Secondary School, New York. With remarkable photographs of boys who combine dance and drama to express powerful statements of their feelings.

6. Batchelder, Marjorie and Comer, Virginia Lee. *Puppets and Plays. A Creative Approach.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956 ($5.50).
A rich source of ideas for the construction of many different kinds of puppets, some made with unexpected materials. With a specific discussion of the method for developing and presenting puppet plays, and an excellent, extensive bibliography.

7. Cheifetz, Dan. *Theater in My Head.* Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1971 ($5.95, paperbound $2.95).



A description of a racially integrated theatre workshop run on Saturdays for eight to eleven-year-olds at a New York church. Appealing photographs highlight the text.

8. Cullum, Albert. *Push Back the Desks.* New York: Citation Press, 1967 ($2.65 paperbound).
An inspired elementary school educator describes the excitement of introducing creative dramatics throughout the school curriculum. Presented with style, taste and the teacher's appreciation of great literature, great art, and the greatness of his students.

9. Goodridge, Janet. *Creative Drama and Improvised Movement for Children.* Boston: Plays, Inc., 1970 ($5.95).
From a British background, special help comes to us in this book for creating stories and plots for dramatization. Ideas abound drawn from observations that children make from life around them, as well as from the study of great persons.

10. McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Dramatics in the Classroom.* New York: David McKay, 1968 ($3.75, paperbound $2.95).
A very practical and clear explanation of the dramatic process written by a skilled teacher who is equally at home in the fields of formal and informal drama.

11. Petza, Robert J. *Creative Dramatics in the Elementary School.* Slides, tape, script, and teacher's guide available from the author at 5604 Purdue Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21239.
Ingenious and beautiful, this presentation stems from the use of creative dramatics in a Baltimore elementary school, and was prepared by a classroom teacher with the help of his students.

12. Pierini, Mary Paul Frances. *Creative Dramatics: Guide for Educators.* New York: Herder and Herder, 1971 ($4.95).
A large softcover book of specific lesson plans with directions for the beginning teacher. Good material on sensory exercises is included.

13. Schwartz, Dorothy Thames and Aldrich, Dorothy, editors. *A Guide to Drama in the Elementary Grades.* Washington, D.C.: American Theatre Association, 1317 F St. N.W., 1972 ($2.95).
A group of nationally selected specialists present a wealth of specific suggestions for creative drama. Formulated from discoveries made in their own individual teaching, and from both regional and national participation in The Children's Theatre Conference, a division of the American Theatre Association.

14. Siks, Geraldine Brain. *Creative Dramatics—An Art for Children.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958 ($9.00).
Used as a text in many colleges, this book describes the values of creative drama. Exercises and suggestions for dramatization, as well as questions for teachers conclude each chapter.

15. Tyas, Billi. *Child Drama in Action.* Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing Ltd., 1971. Distributed in USA by The Drama Book Shop/Publishers.
Different from anything in our field, this attractive Canadian publication initiates ideas for dramatization through the exact words a teacher uses in each lesson plan.

16. Wall, L. V., White, G. A., and Philpott, A. R. *The Puppet Book.* Boston: Plays, Inc., 1965 ($7.95).
A book complete with instructions for the beginner. Where more complicated directions are also included, the very simple explanations of glove, sock, and shadow puppets are within the reach of all children.

17. Ward, Winifred. *Playmaking with Children,* 2nd edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957 ($5.95).
The landmark book in our field in the United States, written by a Northwestern University School of Speech educator who developed her work in the public schools of Evanston, Illinois. The value of the dramatic techniques described in this book is best stated by Hughes Mearns in his dedication of *Creative Power:* "To Winifred Ward, who believes with the author that the natural creative interests of childhood and youth may be developed into superior personal powers."

18. ———————. *Stories to Dramatize.* Anchorage, Kentucky: The Children's Theatre Press, 1952 ($6.00).
Suitable for every age level from kindergarten through junior high school, this is our first anthology of stories selected for this purpose in the United States.

19. Weiner, Jack and Lidstone, John. *Creative Movement for Children: A Dance Program for the Classroom.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1969 ($7.50).
Natural and spontaneously filmed photographs of children illustrate ideas for movement and dance within the power of many classroom teachers to initiate.

20. Woods, Margaret S. *Thinking, Feeling, Experiencing: Toward Realization of Full Potential.* Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, Department of Elementary-Kindergarten-Nursery Education, 1962. ($.75).
This small booklet introduces specific areas of emotional education of basic importance to every teacher of creative drama.

An excellent source for books by mail on every aspect of creative dramatics:
The Drama Book Shop/Publishers
150 W. 52nd Street,
New York, New York 10019.

A clinic for children failing in school. A clinic working with children for whom English is a second language. A New York clinic willing to experiment with unorthodox ways in the hope of salvaging some from this black and Puerto Rican pocket of crime, drug addiction and apathy. The neighborhood—almost a twin of many in our largest cities across the United States.

A huge percentage of families coming to our clinic are on welfare, and far more significant—our Spanish-speaking children referred by their schools are crushed by that almost ceaseless airshuttle from Puerto Rico which brings masses in the golden hope for work. Parent after parent believes the unreachable—that their children will receive some magic sort of mainland education and opportunity far better than the island security from which they have been wrenched.

In three of our major American cities, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York, I have found relatively few child specialists who speak Spanish, whether teachers, social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists. Although many New York hospitals and schools urge their staffs to study Spanish, few have time or the motivation to learn a new language. Too often the frightened Spanish-speaking child taking tests in schools or clinics does not understand the English words asked him. Even bright students are sometimes judged slow or mentally retarded. Confusion builds for the professionals working with the children. In looking back over the records of immigrant children coming to this country whether from German, Italian, Polish, Russian, or Japanese background, the story is the same: the sense of paralysis and crippling experienced by those attending school for the first time, made to feel "different" and stupid by teachers insensitive to the non-English-speaking child. Once the child has pulled his protective overcoat around him, knowing that he has somehow failed in the teacher's eyes, he begins to play that well-known game of silence which students will sometimes tell you about later, once they have come to trust you.

I first encountered that game of silence while teaching Mexican-American children in California[1] in a slum area of East Los Angeles so heavily infiltrated with crime that we routinely searched the boys and girls for knives every day before school began. The students had been forbidden in earlier years to speak Spanish in the classroom. Almost defeated by their cold withdrawal from adults, in desperation I went counter to that instruction, and a kind of miracle slowly emerged. I asked the teenagers in my creative drama classes to teach me Spanish. What a look of disbelief! Then came the slow emergence of their willingness to share their language with me, even some of the secret "pachuco" words used in their private dialect. That co-enjoyment of their language was the key through which they eventually talked, wrote, dramatized and at last came to be my friends. Theirs was a purposeful and a controlling silence which they knew how to use with genius to defy authority.

I recall another kind of silence—the silence shrouding a child's speech, for which medical testing can find no explanation. Pablo was one such thirteen-year-old. Wheelchair-bound from a congenital spinal abnormality, he had been receiving medical treatment in a rehabi-

litation center for four months. Bright, alert, and with a completely healthy vocal mechanism, he sparkled with interest in everything around him. Yet day after day, even the bewildered speech therapist could not get him to utter one word. Pablo's speech remained the mystery of the entire children's ward . . . until one day when I happened to bring theatrical make-up to the children for the first time. I asked each child to describe whomever he would like to be, and then I made up each person's face, following the individual's directions. Pablo's excitement almost consumed him while he waited for his turn. Seizing a blanket from a bed, he held it around his shoulders, indicating with his usual sign language and with a few vocal grunts that he wanted to be an American Indian. The moment he looked at his face in a mirror, I saw a transformation come over him. One thing was missing that he tried to indicate in pantomime—a feather to wear in a band around his head. Then something about his eyes suddenly told me not only that great intelligence was at work, but a serious desire to communicate with me.

"I'll get you the feather, Pablo," I assured him, "But *mira! mira!* (Look! Look!) First I want you to tell me who you are. An INDIAN."

Shyness and a look of almost breaking a promise with himself crossed his face. Then he looked up, and slowly, but very distinctly spoke the first word anyone in the hospital had heard. "In-dun." Rejoicing overtook the whole floor. Pablo wheeled from room to room, displaying his feather and his make-up, and the speech therapist soon found that once this wall came crashing down, Pablo was at last ready to gain much from daily speech therapy.

Why do such phenomenal changes come about in the child for whom English has been such a block, once he has participated in even a few experiences in creative drama? There is nothing mysterious about why such a child responds, releasing some of his latent abilities. In creative drama we ask the child to tell us about anything of real meaning to *him*, then give him an opportunity to live through some of the feeling of that experience by acting it out. His fantasy is thus made more lifelike through the actual doing, or the dramatizing of his idea or wish. In Carl Gustav Jung's words,

"The dynamic principle of fantasy is play . . . but without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable." [2]

Why are we so reluctant to use the child's first language, even if it is not English? Why are many of us so slow to travel on this essential, powerful expressway directly into the child's interest and trust? Even if we do not know his language, why are we so negligent in asking him to teach us even a few of his words? And why, as teachers, does it not occur to us to let the child first write, speak, or dramatize in his own words before asking him to do so in English, a later step which will come openly once the child is freed to communicate his words in his own primary language?

We Begin with Parent Contact

The schools in our vicinity that had contacted us were desperate. All reported outright failure with the foreign language-speaking children referred to us—failure to reach the child academically

or socially. Some judged children untestable by any standards used by the school. Others blamed sporadic attendance, accompanied by accidents or illness.

When the mothers of children applying for help from our clinic were at last assembled for a parents' meeting, we could see a staggering number of problems: confusion, fear, resentment, distrust and ignorance, all reflected in the faces of these anguished, defensive or dejected women. Our staff next divided the total number of applicants into smaller groups. I found myself with eight seven- to-nine-year-old girls, a wonderful age to begin creative drama; but with only forty-five minutes once a week, and often no carryover from week to week if attendance were broken, how would it be possible to give the most to each child? Once more my mind became a maze of questions.

Art Materials as a Departure

As I searched, I discovered. Since it was too early to initiate any kind of dramatization because of the general lack of language, I found one helpful, easy way to begin in those early weeks, a method known to countless nursery school and kindergarten teachers. I started with huge sheets of newsprint approximately 22″ by 36″ wide, available at a small printing company, and with paint brushes ½″ wide. Bright, thick tempera paint poured straight from the jar filled small paper cups, with four or five colors assembled on individual trays borrowed from a cafeteria. Each child then carried a tray of equipment to a different part of the room, and was seated on the floor back-to-back with another. Good! Now each one would not be caught up in timidly imitating another. At different meetings, construction paper in a rainbow of colors, and discarded architects' blueprints were also casually spread out for them to use. Here we began to catch some of our first clues concerning our group.

We had our first look into the kind of tightness in Martina's cramped, miniature figures of sterile-looking children on a gigantic white background; into the wild disorganization behind Laura who spent most of her time mopping up paint which she spilled again and again, hysterically laughing each time; and into the grasshopper-like movements of Alida, jumping from one piece of paper to the next, streaking it only with a primitive mark or a crude line before springing on to tackle the next fresh paper in front of her. Unless the child were deeply caught up in something she *wanted*

to paint, stress was never laid on painting "things" but on painting *"the way something makes you feel."* I then could repeat this quiet explanation in Spanish if the English words were baffling to them, but without expecting or requiring in any way that any child speak back to me.

The more I worked with the group, the more I became conscious not only of their language difficulties, but of the total starvation which all their senses had undergone.[3] It seemed almost as if their senses were in a coma. I began to realize acutely that we must not miss one opportunity to try to awaken their hearing, sight, or senses of touch, taste, or smell. So I now talked about the way things *sounded*. I asked each one to keep her eyes closed at first, listening to the individual tones of a number of small percussion instruments. I spoke also of the way things *looked* as we saw the beautiful colors tumbling onto our paintings, even the *feeling* of the paint when we washed it out of our brushes.[4]

It became apparent in one of these early meetings that Carol possessed a rare ability to transfer her feelings into an abstract art form. She could think purely in terms of color, line and design. Sullen and suspicious, she was the most avid child in the whole group about painting, working in a world alone, with tight lips. Shrouded in the same silence with all of us, she also used it to cut herself off from her abusive grandmother who brought her to the clinic while her mother was at work. Although her parents spoke English, Carol's inner language indeed was German, in which she was always addressed during full-time care by her grandmother.

Carol's first abstract painting now emerged as an astonishing series of twisted, jutting lines, musky olive and bluish-black on a purple background, interspersed with other red and yellow dots. I hung it, mounted on large black construction paper, in a place of honor on the wall. But she would hardly admit its ownership. I praised her painting and let the matter drop.

Suddenly, several weeks later, her short, square, sturdy legs brought this commanding eight-year-old into the room a bit late. She called out an invitation which stopped everyone's paint-brush in mid-air. *"Want to know the secret of my picture?"*

Everyone soberly put down her work, following the beckoning of Carol's stubby finger into a tight little circle. Burying her head in the huddled group, she boomed out her declaration, not in the timid voice her formerly silent lips might have indicated, but with power and glory. "It's a *garden . . . beneath* a garden."

She paused, looked up once dreamily over her shoulder at the proudly hung and mounted painting, and went on,

> "See? . . . Those are the twisted things pushing up. And those are the seeds down there. *It's a long way up to the top where they get the sunshine.*"

Then as abruptly as she had begun, she broke off, skipping spontaneously to the end of the room, glancing happily over her shoulder at the rest of us, open for the first time to sharing herself with us in words. This was the first, but only the first, inch of the long, long way up to the top for Carol.

Into Story Material

One day in February finally arrived when our group shook down to only

three, with most of the mothers too exhausted to bring their children to the clinic any longer. Martina and Carmen at last were offering words both in Spanish and in English to describe some of the fun they were having, and Carol momentarily relaxed enough actually to smile. The telling of a story seemed to be a good start to that day, to try to draw each child to the other once more, and from that springboard perhaps at last dive into dramatization. The first story easily might *not* work. It is sometimes this way in presenting story material to a group, when a dullness, a too-quiet reaction is felt at the end of the telling, when the leader knows she must turn quickly to another book with a casual, "How about listening to something else?"

This time we struck pure gold, for Wanda Gág's ageless *Millions of Cats did* catch hold, *did* release that excited talking between each other at the end which tells the teacher the good news—that the children have loved both the story and the illustrations which she had shown them. She has focused their attention not while *reading* aloud, but *telling* aloud the story.

Millions of Cats is the simple tale of an old woman so lonely for a little cat that her husband goes out to find one for her.

"What did you like about the story?"

"Thuh old man . . . he was FUN-nee!"

"The little, little cat!"

"When they ate up all the grass an' drank all the water!!"

And then as abruptly as she had heard praise given, Carol shouted, "Oh, *I* know that story. Do we have to talk about it? Do we *have* to . . ."

But before the words had barely rushed through her now pouting lips, Martina and Carmen were eagerly pointing to the book. "Show us the kitty! Let us see! Let us see!"

Before the heat had cooled from their words, I quickly went on. "Well, how about acting out the story? Let's see how the old man and the old woman walked, and talked, and . . ."

"Yes! Yes! Please!" Martina and Carmen now hugged each other with excitement. Happiness has an infectious quality, for even Carol, slyly looking out of the corner of her eye at the others, now gave her silent assent.

The Creative Dramatization of the Action

First we talked at some length about the two central characters in the story, an old man and an old woman. What kinds of persons are these? How is an old person different from a young one? How does he talk and move? What does he like to do?

Then quickly we moved on to pantomime. We spoke first of the old man, and what he might be doing when the story begins. Has anyone here seen an old person in his home? Are his movements different from ours? Each child grasped the chance to show us without words what an old person might be doing around the house. Then the rest of us guessed what the silent actions meant. Martina rocked heavily in a chair and read a newspaper. Carol puffed on a pipe. Carmen walked with effort and a hand resting on a painful hip and looked out a window on an imaginary garden. All chuckled continually, each recognizing instantly the meaning of each other's pantomime.

We approached the character of the old woman in the same way, building a variety of actions for her. Carmen felt sure that she would be making coffee for her husband. Martina had been left in the care of her grandmother a great deal and showed us a busy scene of dishwashing and sweeping. Once we had seen the two characters individually, we put them together, and in pantomime brought the tiny beginning to life. We waited until the following week to add words to the action, for we know that speaking and acting together at the start is much too difficult a combination when proceeding creatively.

At our next meeting we discussed how different a man's voice sounds from a woman's, how different a child's from a grown-up's. We practiced separately and together, producing a range of vocal pitches and volumes. And when the flow of words dripped to a trickle between our two Puerto Rican children while they were dramatizing, I urged, "Please say it in Spanish." Carmen and Martina then started afresh. What a torrent of brilliant words rushed out when these two nine-year-olds, tested as mentally retarded by English-speaking-only teachers in their schools, were using their primary language! Carol listened to them and watched, acceptant and observing, eyes ferret-sharp.

Later when they tried the same scene in English, the improvement was overwhelming, for by living out the action first in their own language, Martina and Carmen both thought and felt it through . . . and lost a great element of fear along the way.

On to Puppetry

Carmen, by now, emerged as the only one of the three who felt really comfortable while dramatizing for any time span longer than several minutes. The focus in our group was painfully small and intimate with so few; puppets were now brought in to see whether these girls could lose themselves in a medium removed from themselves. How lucky we found ourselves with our choice. This was right for them! They fell on some ready-made hand-puppets of an old man, an old woman and a cat, like long-lost members of their own families. Swiftly we put together a crude stage, piling some huge building blocks on a table top, draping the whole with a sheet. Now we were ready for action!

Having first dramatized part of the story as human actors, the girls had isolated the germ of a first scene, which they decided took place in the home of the old man and old woman. We tried the puppets on our hands. Each experimented moving her puppet in as many directions and positions as possible, practicing picking up objects, bowing to each other, shaking hands and singing. We rehearsed the unfamiliar and at first tiring position of holding our hands over our heads, meanwhile keeping our heads down so that the unseen audience could not spot us. And quickly, then, we felt eager to start on the first scene itself, which the girls decided to begin with the old man reading his newspaper while the old woman makes his coffee. They agree on names for the two central characters: Blas and Maria.

No matter how many times we play through our scenes in the next few weeks, and no matter how many different variations of action the girls suggest, one straight line of plot develops. It has become so firm in the girls' minds

that they remember it each time, even with lapses in between when one or the other is absent. Carol misses three meetings in a row when her grandmother now refuses to bring her at all, while we finally locate another adult volunteer to provide her transportation. Martina is suddenly hospitalized with rheumatic fever. But in spite of all these events, which would seem to destroy any feeling of unity we had begun to achieve, the girls come back to us after their absences, curious about "What will happen today?", remembering exactly where they stopped the time before. All this, astonishingly, from Carmen, who until then carried a history in school of being unable to remember even a simple sequence of events. This from Carol, now at last so caught up in the playing that she reverently lines up all the small percussion instruments we have on hand and goes to work inventing music for between the scenes . . . "stiff, and sort of thin to go with the puppets," as Carmen suggests, after a moment's deliberation.

"Can we do our play through from the beginning?" I ask. Excitement now has them in its happy grip one bright green spring day, for after two-and-one-half months of working weekly with puppets alone, we have reached the end of their version of Wanda Gág's story.

With a pencil in readiness and a pad on my lap, I take down the following transcript exactly as it flows out.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies, we gonna give a puppet show, and its name is "Millions of Cats."

Scene I

The puppet stage is set with a tiny makeshift stove and a table in Blas and Maria's home.

BLAS: Maria! [calling louder] Maria! Dearie wife! Bring me my newspaper!

MARIA: [calling from off-stage] Just a minute. [appears holding a tiny folded newspaper] Here it is!

BLAS: Oh, thank you. [taking paper and starting to read] All the time's killings peoples! Oh, when is going to finish this? Would like to *stop* that's killing. [passionately] All the time! All the time!

MARIA: [busy at stove] You want some coffee, dear?

BLAS: [still reading the paper] No, thank you.

MARIA: [busying herself at the stove] What are you thinking, husband, about?

BLAS: [quickly] About . . . *you!* [looks up only for a second, goes on reading]

MARIA: [pensively] I'm so sick. I need somebody to be with. I want a little, little cat.

BLAS: [putting down his paper] I'll get you a cat!

MARIA: [quietly] Thank you, my husban'.

MARIA: [looking around the kitchen] Oh, but first please go to the store for me and get me a little tiny of sugar. And I need some milk. Let me get the money. [picks up some money] Here is your money . . . here.

BLAS: Now I go get you some sugar. [bouncing off the stage jovially down-stage left, singing lustily] "Oh, I'm comin' round the mountain when I come!!"

Incidental music is played on our percussion instruments while the scenery is changed for

Scene II

In the woods. A small drum is placed down-stage left and substitutes for a tree.

BLAS: [entering stage right, spotting a kitten hidden behind a tree] Oh, there's a pretty little cat. I think I'll take that one! [pretends to scoop it up. Cat perches on his shoulder] But here's another one over here . . . and here's another . . . an' here's another. Here's another. I'll take that too; [pantomiming loading them all over his back, head, etc.] Come on! [They walk together.]

CAT: I'm hungry!

BLAS: Well, here's some grass. Eat that!

CAT: [pantomiming eating all the grass, then walking on farther beside Blas] I'm thirsty!

BLAS: Well, here's some water for you. Drink that. [Cat pantomimes lapping up water, then walks on beside Blas downstage right.]

BLAS: [singing happily] "Oh, I'm going home round the mountain when I go! Oh, I'm takin' a cat with me when I go!"
[Exits stage right with cat.]

Scene III

Thin, piping music is played while the scene in the woods is changed back to the setting in Blas's home.

MARIA: [appearing stage left at the same moment Blas and the cat enter stage right] Oh, look at all those cats! How will we ever feed them? I said I wanted *one* cat, not a *lotta* cats!! What will we do?

BLAS: [hearing offstage meeowing, and a voice "I'm the prettiest!"] Oh, they're beginning to fight. Let's go into the house. [He huddles hastily with Maria stage left while the voices get louder offstage.] "I'm the prettiest! . . . No, I'm the prettiest! . . . I am! I am! . . . *I* am!"

MARIA: Look, they're eating each other all up! Now, let us go outside and see what happened. [She cautiously moves centerstage with Blas.]

BLAS: Oh, look over there! [The cat is huddled in a corner, stage right.] What are *you* doing?

CAT: Well, when they asked who was the prettiest, I didn't say nothin'. So they didn't eat me up!

BLAS: Well, this is the best cat of all. An' we take you home!

The high pink flush of accomplishment blazes on the cheeks of all three girls as their heads poke up over the edge of the puppet stage. Language has burst forth from its shackles, free at last, since the use of correct grammar, of perfect English was never set as one of our goals for these troubled children. They have been able to produce their play whole, not stopped by anyone who would try to correct their mistakes. But see, looking back, how some of their ungrammatical turns of phrase in English are cleared up in playing either by the initial speaker or when a second child spontaneously picks up the mistake. When children work in an atmosphere where praise is given for their ability to say what they *feel*, and not for the *way* in which it is said, correct spoken English can develop naturally. In Scene I Maria asks Blas to get her "a little tiny of sugar", the literal translation into the English of the Spanish *poquito de azúcar*. But in the next speech, Spanish-speaking Blas picks up the same phrase but rewords it correctly as "some sugar."

What power, what majesty, what elegance we hear come through language rooted in Spanish when children are allowed to retain its beauty in English, such as the phrase Maria speaks quietly near the end of Scene I—"Thank you, my husban'." And Blas's lament early in Scene I reading the newspaper, as heartfelt a cry as any adult is capable of phrasing about war: "Oh, when is going to finish this? Would like to *stop* that's killing. All the time! All the time!" How much less soaring and poetic is our English by comparison, so sturdily earthbound with its rough roots of Saxon, Angle, and Germanic origin.

A Final Look at the Group

With seven months' work at an end, our mothers now returned for conferences. Carmen's mother told me in a final talk that she noticed a marked change in this formerly withdrawn child

who no longer held back from contact with others, and who now sought out her own playmates constantly. Her schoolwork had also improved markedly! Martina's mother, in a rare interview, pointed out that her daughter no longer trembled when looking directly into a person's eyes. New assurance had emerged. She spoke loudly and directly even to strangers, and despite her many illnesses, she no longer became despondent when she went to school. Now she no longer begged to live in the hospital when she returned for treatment.

And Carol—what of her? Had her ingrained distrust of people lessened? Had her failing grades in school improved? Only to a slight degree—enough to make us know that later individual and regular help would be urgently needed for this fascinating and complex child, in order for her to find the "long way up to the top" of her very great potential.

As a final accounting:

To release the flow of language, as well as to build the inner security of the Spanish-speaking child in a creative drama group:

1. Encourage the child to use Spanish words whenever he wishes, especially at the beginning until he gains enough self-confidence to try in English. Learn enough Spanish words as a teacher and use them with the child to establish this bridge of caring and understanding between you.

2. Begin with one or more of the art techniques which require no words from the child—painting with brushes, sponges, finger-paint, or clay—before introducing the much more complex discipline of dramatization.

3. Accept and try the children's ideas once they have begun to play out material, even if the ideas seem startling, or less good in content than the teacher would wish. If a group cares about a play it is creating, children will fight to keep it going and will not abuse the high responsibility they feel in making it excellent.

4. Eagerly welcome any time alone with exceptionally needful or difficult children who are struggling with the problem of a second language, even if your time is spent non-verbally working on one of many possible art forms—listening to music together, working with percussion instruments, making a collage, creating a puppet, painting a mural in the most primitive form.

5. Avoid correcting mistakes in children's grammar, or "cleaning up" and rearranging material which Spanish-speaking children volunteer, in order to keep their flow of enthusiasm constant. This can be done later once the child's confidence has become well enough established. If the teacher will keep her hands off this kind of "correction", she will begin to help release far greater strengths inherent in the children: their humor, logic and creative thinking.

And NOTE:

Although this work was done in a clinic, results were identical with Spanish-speaking children in a West coast public school system, in an East coast rehabilitation center, and in a summer school program for the disadvantaged where I used a similar approach. I have no doubt that the same method of proceeding step by step as described in this section would be equally effective with children speaking almost any language other than English as their first language.

While a group process reduced to only three children in the dramatization is described here, exactly the same procedure is effective in the classroom with any number that one teacher can handle. The focus on very small numbers, whether two, three, or five at a time, should encourage especially the teachers of open education to try creative drama in the open classroom. Here is a magnificent way of getting many small groups to work effectively on their own ideas within the framework of a larger setting.

With however many or few, or with whatever dark problems come into our room in the body of the child struggling with the compounded felony of an unfamiliar language, we must be watchful. We must look hard, listen long, and touch gently to uncover ways we have approached children in the past which no longer work. And seeing, hearing, and feeling, we may then begin that journey "a long way up to the top" of every needful child.

[1] Gillies, Emily P. "Crosses and Knives," *Childhood Education*, May 1946 and April, 1947.
[2] As quoted in *Natural History* magazine, December, 1971, p. 77.
[3] Compare *Sensory Deprivation*, A Symposium at Harvard Medical School. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961 for results of studies on sensory starvation.
[4] See Cole, Natalie Robinson. *The Arts in the Classroom*. New York: John Day Co., 1940, and *Children's Arts from Deep Down Inside*. New York: John Day Co., 1966, for the record of a teacher's marvelous encouragement of deprived Mexican, black and Chinese students similar to some of these girls.
[5] Gág, Wanda. *Millions of Cats*. New York: Coward-McCann and Geoghegan, Inc., 1938.

Creative Dramatics with the Emotionally Disturbed

While many of our children came to our clinic with problems stemming from the use of English as a second language, a far greater number arrived for emotional help on an even deeper level.

Emotional illness, I soon learned, to the schools, social workers or family courts referring children to us, meant that each troubled boy or girl was failing to function daily in a creative, integrated and on-going fashion. Behavior ran from extremes on either end of the social see-saw: withdrawn and suspicious, or flamboyantly belligerent and abusive. To the medical doctors, a referral to our clinic meant that the child was likely to suffer from psychosomatic illnesses. To parents as well as to teachers, their children's lack of warm human relationships spoke the saddest tale of all: no friends, no playmates, no one from whom to gain the kind of satisfaction whose lack resulted in emotional anemia.

I began to meet in conference each child of a new group with which I was soon to work. In these separate meetings, I could begin to understand so much more clearly the New Testament references to those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." Here before me were the modern parallels to the social failures of Christ's time, starved or dehydrated from lack of human warmth, concern, understanding, and sharing.

Our clinic had assigned me eight eleven- to thirteen-year-olds for whom no individual psychiatrist was yet available. All were children sufficiently in touch with reality to respond to creative drama. Screening of the children covered several weeks, and at the end came the time to read the case histories taken by our social workers. What a revelation! These eight emotionally ill children chosen for my group came from similar backgrounds. Except for one boy, no child had a father who lived at home with the family. The children in all cases but one roamed the streets. Meanwhile their mothers rightly agonized over the bad influences with which their sons or daughters came in contact. Nearly all the youngsters were "loners" without one close friend. And finally, bad housing hurt each child—overcrowded neighborhoods, too many persons packed into too few rooms.

Six out of eight in my group-to-be were plagued by psychosomatic complaints: violent back or head or stomach aches, nausea, dizziness, tension and exhaustion. In addition, every boy or girl felt the inward load of at least one major conflict expressed through fears of being alone, of being punished unfairly, or of spending any money even if he earned it. They found it difficult to conform to discipline both at home and in school. They were failing in school academically and socially. They suffered from nightmares, poor appetite, temper tantrums, crying spells and general depression. What a seeming impossibility to try to meet even part of the total needs of eight different ill boys and girls, who came only once a week for forty-five minutes! Perhaps the thing that saved our perspective was honesty, the fundamental admission among the members of our project that we simply did not know to what degree we could help until a psychiatrist was available. We knew we must try. Otherwise only interminable waiting, waiting, waiting lay ahead of these children, and increasing illness of spirit and illness of body too costly for a human soul or a society to bear.

The First Day

Since motivation was so low among these children, the staff warned me not to expect regular attendance, especially since they were so inconsistent in coming for other hospital therapy. Therefore I looked ahead to the first day of class with a hopeful excitement, but with apprehension. Inevitable questions washed through my mind. Would this new group of white, black and Puerto Rican children respond in the same way as my former groups of disturbed Mexican or black children, groups all drawn from the same culture or race? Would they respond at all?

Quiet, subdued, with a running inner sense of anticipation stands the knot of children in the waiting-room of the hospital the day we begin. I hardly dare believe it—they have all arrived! Helga, sunk deeply within herself over her father's recent death, twists the key chain around her neck and stares tragically into space. Luz, whose actions her mother described as "like a little old lady" with no playmates her own age, returns my friendly smile with a dead stare. Gwen, looming a full head above some of the others her own age, shakes back a great mane of raven hair and nervously chews on her lip.

Almost all of them came to us either overly quiet and unresponsive, or sullen and resentful. Save Enrique, whose constant smile frosted over the tremulous spirit inside, a belief in his unworthiness so deep that he called himself "stupid". Enrique's automatic smile clicks on. "I've been waiting since one o'clock," he beams, proud that he had arrived a half hour early.

Yolanda's sullen lips now curve up with a plan of her own to win the teacher's approval, and she holds up a small snapshot. "My first communion picture —for you," she murmurs wooingly, with great calculation, through barely moving lips. I thank her, and then I thank them each, an opportunity they give me spontaneously *to thank them just for coming*. For this miracle of their arrival makes it possible to begin, with no latecomer at a disadvantage.

Because of the shortage of space in our hospital, and the lack of a room big enough for our class, we have turned to a private school in the next block which has extra space. We move off as a group to walk the few minutes to our destination, and find that as we leave, an unusual chance is given us for picking up straws of conversation, for beginning to get acquainted. Sunshine bathes us as we go. It seems to add its benediction to some of the human warmth that begins to slip from one member of our band to another. Can I believe what I see and hear? Gwen, so negative in her own home, commenting on the fun of having Luz, somewhat like a younger sister, in the class; Enrique goodnaturedly escorting the group of girls past a traffic light and scores of New York tourists; and Helga and Yolanda, two alone-children who had never before met, sauntering along now with arms linked. As the weeks slip by, these to-and-from-class walks bring rich moments for listening to things close to their hearts which classtime does not cover. They speak of fighting with classmates at school, beatings received from parents, the loss of one boy's afterschool job, and the dream of another to become an astronomer; blackmail, archi-

tecture, and another boy's interest in short-story writing! I give all their comments a singled-out ear for hearing the story through. Each is accepted as part of the privilege one finds in another friend's confidence. But the first day. . . .

Pantomime

So much, nearly everything rests in delicate balance on the reaction of the flock to the first class period, where each person's internal tape-recorder takes down everything, telling him whether he likes what he's doing and whether he will want to return. That first day of every creative dramatics group bears witness to the research of Canadian neurosurgeon Dr. Wilder Penfield, who found during the course of brain surgery that *the brain indeed acts as a high-fidelity tape recorder, taking down not only every single detail of every experience, but the feelings connected with the experience.*[1] Those of us working in creative drama find we must plan that first day with infinite care, and for that very reason. Each of us uncovers ways of approaching that first day's experience which blessedly seldom fail to work, and which carry a high degree of interest for the children. Often for me with this age level, the use of several properties or objects around which interesting action can be built, is an excellent way to begin with a new class. But first each gains much from discussing and taking part in pantomime, which we find frees the child more quickly, makes his acting more fluid and closer to real life, before complicating him with dialogue.

"Boys and girls, it's exciting to have a dramatics class with people when we all feel that we are going to be friends." [The exchange of some sidelong glances. Can this teacher be for real?] "When you knew you were coming here today, what did you think we might do?"

I look slowly around the huge gymnasium in which we're seated, barren of furniture except for our folding chairs, barren of feelings in the group except for guardedness and caution.

Helga looks up with the first alive response she's shown. "Give a play for the children *in* the hospital?"

Yolanda's face suddenly grows angry-dark, and she glares around the vast, empty space. "We should give a show . . . but WHERE'S THE CURTAIN?" She looks betrayed, disgusted. "We had a show at school . . . with clothes . . . an' singin' . . . an' dancin' an' EVERYTHIN'. I doan' see no curtain." She spits silently on the floor and starts sullenly swinging her shoulder pocketbook in low loops from side to side.

I gulp—I hope not too visibly—then plunge ahead.

"Yolanda, there *is* a curtain in this room, between you and me. It's a curtain you can't see—but it's going to seem absolutely real to you after a while. But first before we see the curtain, we're going to work on something called *pantomime*. Can anyone tell us what that is?"

Gwen's bulky arm excitedly looms in the air. "We had that in *our* school in dramatics," she volunteers, flushed over the success of having something to offer others. "It's . . . it's action without words. Do you . . . shall . . . uh, do you want me to show you?"

And with the class's interested though guarded approval, we are off to a start! I sigh in deep relief, for the awesome has

happened . . . a student, summoning all the trust she owns, has volunteered for the first step in the process we call creative drama. My early apprehension begins to dissolve as I watch Gwen's cheeks aflame, pantomiming combing her hair, her sturdy, huge body turned sideways while she looks into an imaginary mirror. Her excellence in her pantomimed action draws an immediate murmur of pleasure from several. And thus reassured that pantomime is something fun, with no testing or grades attached, our troupe will be more willing to enter into this first experience.

I now invite the class to come up *as a group* to the acting area which I quickly tell them is one whole end of the gymnasium. Even the most apprehensive or unsure child will almost always move into the unfamiliar world of pantomime if allowed to be part of a whole unit, never singled out at the start. Black, green, blue and brown eyes dull with apathy and suffering are now riveted on me as I tell them that we are all standing in the nearby train station at 125th Street. We are all passersby who will be looking at some objects, or failing to see them, after I have placed a few things on the floor. Asking them to spread far apart in the acting area, I then place a railroad ticket, a billfold, and a rhinestone bracelet on the floor, each in a different area.

"Here is the ticket booth over here," I indicate, pointing in one direction, "And over there is the magazine stand near the street entrance. What would each of you do if you saw these things on the floor of the station?"

Something close to their everyday lives will draw reactions from them if anything can. With the simplest instruction, "Ready . . . feel the character you are, all the way inside . . . and now *begin*, with no words," I step back.

I watch the entire group of children begin to move across the room, hesitantly at first, but with a security which begins almost imperceptibly to mount as each is aware that the *total* number of them is in motion. Some react in astonishment to the things they see, others hurry by as though it's a relief to get out of sight, still others move with no feeling at all. But *all* of these uncertain or bitter children—moved, which as P. L. Travers had the indomitable Mary Poppins once declare, is "an absolute, Marvellous, Wonderful Wonder."

"Fine, Helga! I could see you were surprised, noticing the rhinestone bracelet. Excellent, Enrique! You really *were* afraid, weren't you? I liked the way you hesitated as though you wondered if you dared pick up the billfold. Now I'd like to have you see what each other is doing. There are so many good things to watch! This time, half of you go back to your places in the station, and the other half sit here as the audience. Then we'll trade around so that the audience can do the acting next time."

In this way we narrow down the group until we are eventually working with one child alone . . . but so painlessly that the individual has not felt the terror of being singled out as a person in front of the others, alone at the start. After each playing, the first question always asked comes with variations in the basic wording, "What did you *like* about what you saw?" Calling for positive comments from the start shields them from destructive initial criticism, searchlights even

the smallest point of good for which they are being taught to look, and acts as the forerunner to the second question which calls again for constructive criticism, "How can we make this better?" With emotionally disturbed children, one can start from the beginning to lead the group toward constructive criticism. It is this very process of learning to question and think positively which helps disturbed children, who are so myopic in their insight into human feelings. Thus one begins to understand far more about the way in which strong human relationships are built when one learns to value another person's effort.

I went home that night to begin the notes which are the essential basis for the whole class record. And here among the notes stood something almost electrifying, something which had come with the swiftness of a falling star, something most elemental: the positive response to our class which was enough to overwhelm any teacher. Had the *mixture* of children protected us from allowing any one knot of students to terrify and dominate the others? Did the children feel so deprived of acceptance in their own lives that the class drew such an enthusiastic reaction from them? My initial fears for the success of our group dissolved after the second meeting, for attendance became regularly 100 percent, with each one but Jaime volunteering to play more and more as time went on.

The World of Sound and Touch

Recognizing the agonizing limitations several had with language, I explain one day that drama covers far more than even words or actions. It includes all kinds of *sounds*. First we close our eyes as a group and listen to the sounds in the room, then to the sounds of the city outside. This is a new game for all, and they light on it with elation, with wonder over their discoveries. I time them for a five-minute listening period, with instructions to keep their eyes closed.

They speak, pouring out the words with no reservations, and none of the guarded holding back of the first day.

"I could hear Luz breathing."

"*I* heard the sound of someone uncrossing their legs!"

"Outside . . . there's LOTSA noise."

"A paper bag rustled inside the room."

And then Stevie, alight with his own inner revelation: "I hear *bigger* sounds of trucks, and a squeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeek! . . . and then little sounds for cars. There are big sounds, and there are BIGGER sounds."

I introduce ten small percussion instruments which we now use as another kind of experience. I ask the boys and girls to close their eyes once more . . . but this time to talk of something new . . . their own inner feelings, how the sounds of the instruments make them *feel*. Small Javanese temple bells and strings of tinkling shells draw out to-be-expected comments, such as:

"I feel happy."

"It makes me feel like dancing."

But when the sharp percussion sounds come, such as a sudden clap on a heavy wooden Chinese temple bell, Peter's lips squeeze into a tormented wrinkle, and he gasps, "I feel afraid . . . like I'm sick at my stomach."

A pair of Chinese cymbals struck together simply for contrast in the quality of sound draws quick frowns from Luz, who whimpers, "A lotta noise. Don't like!"

And from Enrique, the significant ob-

servation, "Oooooooo . . . makes me feel like . . . ooo, it hurts up here. Like a . . . a headache." Here are reactions I quickly jot down, which will be of interest to the children's psychiatric clinic.

Swiftly pushing the chairs to the walls to open up all the space around us, I bring out some records, Artur Rubinstein's album of Villa-Lobos's piano selections,* and a small portable victrola. I ask them to spread way out—to move as the music makes them feel when it begins, and to listen for changes in the record. In this new medium, Jaime's uncertain, diminutive attention span stretches far beyond its boundaries. Music helps his feet find their way into a beautiful large canvas of inherent abstract patterns so new that they would make even a Jackson Pollock envious of the far-flung scope he commands. Luz, no longer hemmed in with the limitations of any spoken language, does her first creative thinking in movement—amazingly lovely stretches combined with twists and sudden, quiet suspensions. She makes me know that the whole field of modern dance could have been given birth by such a human being. I witness an original and pure kind of movement, though strangely devoid of feeling. Wordlessly how much more clearly I begin to see my children, especially those who until now I have not reached because of my own limitations!

The room and all its participants take on a total beauty as Jaime and Luz begin to let the movement carry them, begin to tell us without words of the unfolding world which moves them from within. Now Peter, in sudden contrast to his former giggling, fumbling silliness, seems infected with the atmosphere. He takes an Indian bell in hand, and steps with powerful slowness across the floor, swinging his bell with huge dignity, repeatedly thrusting one strong arm toward the sky. Afterwards, when a sparkling but calm group of children files down the stairs, Peter's eyes are clear, sure of what he has experienced.

"The music made me feel *great*," he says, "like Alexander the Great, or someone!" And happily, with certain inner peace even for those few moments, the boy who had been called silly, backward, and babyish by his classmates in his regular school sessions walks thoughtfully down the hall.

Not only do we put aside time for opening our collective ears to sound, but on another day, proceeding into still another dimension, we speak of touch—how textures, temperatures, masses and weights feel to our fingers. Or to our faces, our feet, our elbows! Our class spirit is building now so that as we pass a group of widely assorted objects around the group, the children exclaim more to one another than to me, communicating their discoveries . . . a marvelous advance in their growing pleasure in each other. Learning is flowing more freely now, when the teacher can slip into that envied position not as leader but as a member of a band of growingly merry men.

Stevie's ears not only hear much, but his fingers explore endlessly, never at rest. He confides deliciously to Enrique, regarding a China silk scarf, that "it feels slick—like sliding off a bed!" Yolanda's eyes, black as a thunderhead, change ex-

*Villa-Lobos, Heitor. "Prole do Bebé"—Suites 1-6. RCA LSC 2605.

pression, and for a moment shine with merriment as she notices the strange-feeling ridges on a twisted shell. And Jaime excitedly points out to his companions on either side of him that an unusual piece of petrified wood seems almost weightless. This boy with a great language problem and excruciating migraine headaches suddenly finds he *has* much he can say, once he begins to talk spontaneously about something which he finds almost spell-binding in its interest. Watching their faces and hearing their voices as they touch lovely objects brings me to a more complete understanding of Plato's conviction: "The function of beauty in the education of children is to lead them imperceptibly to love through sensory experiencing what they will afterward learn to know in its own form as an intelligible principle."

The Play Begins

Three meetings have now taken place, and the class is beginning to stir collectively toward story material.

"When do we make a show?" Yolanda reminds me belligerently.

"How about today? What kind of a story would you *like* to act out?"

Almost all hands shoot up frantically. Determination grips their faces as each feels he now has a stake in a critical decision, and that his must win out!

Helga wants the ominous and complicated Hans Christian Andersen story, "The Red Shoes". Peter and Enrique feel that only one kind of story is possible—a mystery. Gwen would like something about girls her own age. "Cinderella" is Yolanda's positive and sole choice; and Stevie thinks of nothing but books about outer space. My heart leaps. They care! But as reality sets in, I crawl home in real despair, wondering how it will ever be possible to satisfy the finely honed interests of so many positive-minded young people in only six more meetings. As the hours speed toward tomorrow, I begin to plan. Then after consultation with my clinic staff, we decide that I will ask the group if we might combine some basic elements from all these stories and ideas, making up a composite plot.

The girls and boys eat up the time at the next meeting so ravenously that I know that the idea of a "group plot" has been right. Each contributes so intently to making up part of the story-line or plot of his own play that at the end of the period we are literally out of breath, and we still don't want to stop. Even Yolanda ceases swinging the inevitably-looping shoulder-strap purse, and listens as each adds his suggestions to the following emerging plot:

A scientist, experimenting in his laboratory on a chemical which will transport him up to the moon, needs a human being on whom he can try out his experiment. His own child wanders into his laboratory and discovers his father doing "something cruel" to another child on whom he is trying out his chemical injection. The scientist then turns to give an injection to his own child instead, who collapses from the shot. Terrified of the harm he thinks he has done, the scientist drinks a potion he has invented and escapes to the moon.

Breaking into groups of two, each cluster busily talks over plans; discussion centers on the nature of "something cruel" which the experiment involves. With the aid of some mysterious background music*, we start our action with no further comment. Each pair of chil-

* Such as the first movement of Nikola: Rimsky-Korsakov's "Le Coq d'Or" Suite, RCA LSC 2725.

dren is now given an individual chance to show the rest its own plan, first in pantomime, later adding dialogue if they wish. Sometimes the most effective ideas from classes evolve this way, when children have done their thinking in their own groups alone—the surest proof of any that the creative moment is waiting there within each human being, needing only action or words to animate it.

The feelings of each person as he participates in this free dramatization seem unusually intense today.

"When I walk in as the scientist's son and see what he's doing, I feel like running away," soberly comments Peter.

"And I'm so ashamed of the cruel thing he's doing to that little girl that I'd want to go away with her so that no one would find out," offers Helga uneasily.

We discuss our characters' feelings now in much greater detail. How is the scientist affected when he discovers that the experiment has hurt his own child? Did he intend to be cruel?

"Oh, *no*," gasps the class. "No . . . *NO!!*"

"But even so, he should be *punished*," resolutely claims Gwen.

We accept her feelings, but suggest that sometimes people make mistakes and are not punished—a new thought to several who are struggling profoundly with the question of punishment, deserved or undeserved.

We play bits of the scene many times in pantomime, with various combinations of ideas until we build a whole short scene. Then we add dialogue spontaneously which now streams forth with ease, now halts and bogs down, now flows again as each child grows used to a new idea. He *is* a person different from his everyday self while acting, he finds. This new skill in dialogue is becoming a difficult one to master, however, for the members of the group who had an initial problem with language. Jaime, Enrique, Luz and Yolanda are beginning to break away from the group once more. Swiftly it is time to change the pace—the eternal demand for anyone who is a teacher. We must now move back into a more primitive kind of expression, not requiring words.

At this moment we are ready to go on to the next scene, which the class strongly feels should take place on the moon. Quickly I glance over the emergency supply of victrola records I keep on hand for moments when a group needs to move into the non-verbal. One record* seems right to help set the mood, to help create the kind of atmosphere we need for imagining. The music begins. We are in action once more. This time, with haunting strains quietly building in the background, I tell the whole class to move to the music, moving as we imagine persons might if they lived on that planet. and *moving at the same time with feeling.* I call "Curtain," and then all join in, wordlessly, pleasurably, suddenly for the first time part of each other and of the music, too. This time not even Enrique holds back. Luz expresses *real* feeling for the first time in her dramatizing since the class has met—no longer the boxed-in, neutral, although

* "Daybreak" from Ravel's "Daphnis and Chloe" suite. [RCA LSC 2568.] Had the class met more often and felt more secure, the students might have improvised their own percussion background, or their own vocal accompaniment in sounds alone.

sometimes beautiful response we have seen in her up until now. In her pantomime of a person walking sleepily on the moon's surface, she abruptly looks around, an aura of wonder engulfing her, then changes, breaking through to joy, excitement illuminating her entire face, her whole slender body.

"STOP! All freeze in place! And WATCH! Watch Luz again! See how sleepy she is at the start. And then how alive, how amazed at what she sees!"

They do stop. They watch. No longer frightened of being watched alone, Luz moves to the music once more, alone now, and with the respectful eyes of the whole group bathing her. The sense of wonder still surrounds her. The joy on her face is very real now. And the praise of the group is solid, uniform and immediate. One can almost feel physical warmth emanating from Luz as she finishes, her slight frame poised and relaxed, balanced lightly back on one heel. A tiny but steady smile cups around her lips, like the smallest flame stroking the kindling of a fire.

The next person ignited by the new praise given to the dramatizing of a gamut of feelings is Peter. Creeping softly onto the area used as the stage, his arm suddenly stabs the air, frantically volunteering to try the part of the scientist. We all watch while the music begins once more. Peter starts at one side of the room, crouches, listens, stalks warily, inches forward, and then, stopping and facing us all full-face, steps back, aghast at some object he pretends to see. He turns and bolts off the stage. The class rejoices vocally full force!

"That . . . that looks . . . that was *good!*" tumbles out Enrique's accolade.

Afterwards, in a moment alone with Peter I tell him what a great distance he has come, for he is now able to keep in character completely. Does he remember how difficult he used to find it, such a short time ago, to act without smiling or laughing, no matter what part he was playing?

"Want to know how I did it?" questions Peter confidingly, the triumph complete on his face. "I've got a secret. I just bite the inside of my cheek." *He looks up, a human being at that moment in full control of his inner emotions. The way through to repeating a moment just that satisfying for him may not be so much farther away, I think to myself.*

The Play Becomes a Play

Now the scene takes shape and the class decides that the scientist encounters both strange people and animals on the moon. From this foreign world, he tries to steal part of a hidden treasure . . . which is abruptly invented as a new part of the plot. When the moon's inhabitants move toward the scientist menacingly, he again escapes, this time back to his home. The scene ends. We see our play's form becoming visible! Gwen and Yolanda arrive early at our next class meeting and are full of questions about "What happens next?"

"How would you two like to work out some ideas right now—before the others come? Then you can show us when the rest get here." They scramble into a corner, co-conspirators in working toward the building of the climax.

When the whole class has assembled within the next fifteen minutes, Yolanda and Gwen ask if Luz may play the part of the scientist's daughter. Quickly they give her a few whispered instructions,

huddled in a small knot just off the acting area. The three girls are ready so speedily that I know they would be too impatient to play the scene first in pantomime. They begin instantly, with no previous rehearsal, in dialogue—a skill which children acquire once they are secure with earlier groundwork in pantomime. My pencil is ready, and I take down the following dialogue.

The scene swiftly opens with the scientist's wife (Yolanda) cooking dinner, while the daughter is playing outside. The scientist (Gwen) enters, first ill at ease and hesitant, and then begins to plead with his wife, explaining his absence. His wife looks at him, impassive.

SCIENTIST: Please believe me. When I tried that experiment on Luz and saw her fall down on the floor, I didn't know what had happened to her. I was afraid. I thought maybe she's been hurt, so I was a coward. I wanted to get away. I went up to the moon.

[WIFE stares resolutely, saying nothing.]

SCIENTIST: WHAT HAPPENED TO HER? Is she all right? *Please* tell me!

WIFE [quietly]: Do you want to see her? [going to the door and calling] Luz!

[LUZ enters, bouncing a ball.]

SCIENTIST [joyfully]: Oh, Luz! [hugging her] You're all right! [turning to wife] Please let me come home. If you let me stay, I'll—I'll work. *I'll even get a job.* [Seeing his wife is still unmoved.] All right, if you don't believe me, call the police. Put me in jail if you want to. But that's what happened. I *did* go to the moon. Only I'm going to stop running away from things now. I've run away twice—first from you and Luz, and then from the people on the moon. *I can't keep running away.*

What clear moments present themselves to the creative drama teacher for calling "curtain"—for stopping when the moment is right for some discussion, some chance to see where we started and where we have arrived. Few instants come during a whole relationship with a class on which one can look back and say, "This was one of the best we reached." But this was one. We realized it silently together.

We quickly sit in a circle on the floor, and briefly discuss two possible endings suggested by the group. One ending is considered in which the wife resignedly accepts her husband back, another in which she takes her daughter by the hand and escapes out the back door the moment her husband leaves to buy a newspaper. Overwhelmingly, save for Helga's resistance, the plea of the whole class is for the father to be allowed to stay, a resolution which is finally accepted by the entire gathering. And in this plea, one somehow feels that one and the same aching cry rises up in the throats of each of these children. Here is the cry aloud for the father in their own lives who is missing. Here is the moment which I have come to call "making a statement," the group voice out of their total experience in creative drama when their deepest observation or wish is expressed.

If the teacher has honored their ideas up to now, she will be able to hear the statement once it is made, for it comes with such clarity—in this case in Gwen's own words as the scientist: *"I can't keep running away."* Had this obese thirteen-year-old learned something about her own constant running away from life, retreating into a home where she allowed her emotionally ill mother to feed her by hand everything she ate? In taking the part of the mother and accepting

her husband's return, had Yolanda learned anything about compassion or tenderness as a substitute for her former pattern of physically clawing anyone she could not accept? Had any of the others learned things not even apparent in our group?

Our play, completed after two-and-one-half months, now even bears a final title contributed by Gwen—"The Scientist, His Family and His Problems." It is presented the final day of our class for an audience of the players' enthusiastic relatives, in response to the group's own plea for a performance. Now I could begin to see what did and did not happen to various members of our class through our once-a-week drama meetings. Changes had come about in every single member of our group. In every case, those changes were exact parallels of cases in research by Ruth E. Hartley, Lawrence R. Frank and Robert M. Goldenson with younger children, which revealed that "dramatic play helps the child develop from a purely egocentric being into a person capable of sharing and of give and take."[2] Some of the changes could be considered minor compared with the seriousness of the child's illness, demonstrating how much extra help would need to be given both to the child and his family in the months to come. Jaime and Helga were two of these for whom intensive psychiatric care was urgently recommended.

On the last day of the group, Helga's aunt waited to walk home with this still very tense and depressed girl, her lanky blonde hair pushed back from her pinched face. Helga turned swiftly to me, referring to a braided key chain which she was trying to finish as a farewell gift to Luz. "I could do it," she said slowly with a knowing look, and a flashing moment of insight for me, "but I need a little more time."

"A little more time . . ."

Had we been granted it, one wonders whether even Jaime could have been reached. One wonders what further values and what deeper changes might have come about in each child. For creative dramatics has been but one of the many positive experiences these children need to survive the blows that life rains on them. Given the help he finds crucial to his life, no matter how long it takes, the emotionally ill child can gain an unusual degree of insight that can help him emerge as a human being of the deepest sensitivity and concern for his fellow man.

In Conclusion

In working with the emotionally disturbed child whether in a clinic, a private school, a public school, or with individual children referred to me by a family service or a physician, I have come to believe one basic principle. Nothing seems to feed the ill child's deepest needs more completely in my field than listening to and encouraging him to use his own ideas. He can thus be led to understand the value of his own thinking, which is unique to him alone. In turn, as the beginner's idea of uniqueness builds, his sense of respect for himself increases. Unlike all the Spanish language-speaking groups or the brain damaged, the emotionally ill with whom I've worked have been able to follow the classic steps in creative drama first formulated in the United States by Winifred Ward in her landmark books.[3] Many sick children are too disturbed

and out of touch with reality to profit from creative drama at all. But for those who can, a hidden spring of power awaits.

Herein also lies one of the greatest helps creative drama can give the disturbed child—an opportunity to act out, and thus enter into, a sweep of feelings, many of which have been closed off to him before. He may have been frightened of experiencing love, or anger, belief in himself, or trust in another—these, and many more human emotions. Here before his eyes, he can see *others* experiencing feelings alien to him before. He can also dare to enter in to allowing such feelings to flower within himself in a safe way.

Especially with the emotionally disturbed, we can freely, proudly and safely use creative drama:

1. to help build his sense of respect for his own ideas and therefore for himself, *a respect lacking in almost every disturbed child.*

2. to offer him an opportunity to become aware of and understand his feelings, *the emotional starvation or imbalance of which has made him ill.*

3. to provide him with the social contact with others so often cut off from his daily experience.

4. to help him experience firmness and the inner control so often absent, in a positive and enjoyable way.

5. to furnish the chance for the child to be heard alone as well as in a group.

6. to bring us in contact with clues which may be the basis of the child's illness, and which must often be treated later professionally by psychiatrists, play-therapists etc.

We do this with the conscious knowledge that there is often a direct correlation between the use of creative drama and improvement in the ill child's academic work.

Since today's child is growing in a world of intense complexity, speed and mobility which creates its own holocaust, the teacher may be facing more emotional problems within a normal classroom than he or she has been required to handle since the inception of American education. In a normal high school, Liesbeth Schoolwerth sees and writes all too clearly, speaking to her own classmates to whom she addresses:

kids, a chorus
we need
something substantial
something to hide behind
clamber on
play with
stare at
talk to
something with windows
something if we grab on
and shake till our fingers bleed
it won't move
an invisible. . . .
something
the easiest breeze can slip through
and tickle our ears.

From *La Collina D'oro*, 1967, yearbook of the American School in Switzerland at Lugano. Used with permission.

As she alerts us so poignantly in words more powerful than educators could summon, today's youth must have "something substantial," something of such reliable substance that it will bear them up even . . . "if we grab on and shake till our fingers bleed."

Methods which we have learned from working with the emotionally disturbed in creative drama can be a strength to the classroom teacher of normal children. Such methods can bring a more finely wrought insight into the emotions of all children, and into processes of channeling these emotions in safe and creative ways. In so doing, today's teacher can contribute in the widest possible sense to the total health and to the growing wholeness of his or her students.

[1] Harris, Thomas A. *I'm OK: You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis.* New York: Harper and Row, 1969, pp. 5, 11.
[2] Hartley, Ruth E., Frank, Lawrence K. and Goldenson, Robert M. *Understanding Children's Play.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, p. 19.
[3] See "Twenty Resources for Creative Dramatics" on page 22.

Creative Dramatics with the Brain Injured

"Kin I play the drum? Kin I? *KIN I?!*"

An insistent voice with the sharp bite of a buzz-saw cut across me as I stood at the door of the classroom. My sleeve was being jerked unrelentingly at the same time, just in case I missed the speaker's voice. I looked straight down into Sandy's green eyes glinting up at me, started to speak to the boy so desperate to play the tom-tom I was carrying, and then immediately lost him.

"Hey!" yelped Sandy, darting mosquito-quick away from me into the group of children waiting in a disorganized semicircle. "She's here! She's come!"

Hopelessly the classroom teacher was trying to keep the children seated while I walked over quietly to stand in front of the group. An almost visible sea of noise washed over me, flooding from several parts of the semicircle. Sandy, who seemed to have forgotten his question as abruptly as he had approached me, was by now hitting Karen, who pathetically whimpered "Go away. I don't want to hit you. Go away! I don't want you to tempt me." Gordon had withdrawn into his own world, unaware that Jimmy, seated beside him, was carrying on a low monologue addressed to no one. Pamela slumped, twisting and biting strands of her curly red hair, while June sat open-mouthed and apprehensive, watching two boys next to her viciously pounding each other's arms.

Earlier in the week, I had visited this special room for brain-damaged children. The classroom teacher was eager that I begin creative drama classes twice a week, and had invited me to come and observe. Although thoroughly trained to handle this special kind of child whose learning problems stemmed from birth injuries, later accidents or illness, she confessed that she was often thoroughly baffled by her seven to eleven-year-olds. An interminable struggle for discipline ensued every week, she went on to say; even after a successful and happy day, her class of nine students sometimes abruptly fell into behavior that made nursery school children look sophisticated by comparison. What set them off? The weather? Exhaustion? The excitement of an approaching holiday? She herself felt powerless to understand, and told me that at such times she often resorted to an enforced rest for them all.

Their academic problems were as puzzling as their behavior, I was to learn. We would need to discover our own educational Rosetta Stone before we could begin to understand how to work with them. Since almost every child went wild if given any freedom, at times their class routine purposely offered them almost no chance to move around. Their curriculum included no creative art, no creative music, and few opportunities to plan or work on their own with other children. Emphasis struck heavily on academic areas, with special classes every day in reading, writing, and speech therapy given by an additional specialist. But all these efforts brought slim results. Despite such academic concentration, most had limited language development — a deficiency which could condemn each child to further failure in later years, a yardstick by which he would be judged stupid, incapable of creative thinking, or of control except by force or medication.

Not only one, but two days were set aside for observation before starting to work with the children. Any approach to these boys and girls would have to be

custom-tailored for them, I was certain. Even after only two visits, I concluded that the brain-damaged child is one of the most fascinating but enigmatic of all human personalities. Until some final moment when skillful training, self-understanding and warm relationships with other caring but firm persons can help his inner strengths emerge, he is most often a mystery even to himself.

He is complexity itself—a maze of inner signals or half-formed feelings of which he is hardly aware. He can be quarrelsome, irascible and moody. He can be inconsistent and unpredictable—but sometimes with a sudden flash of mature behavior which lights up the beautiful possibilities hidden darkly within him. Then again good moments can seem to trigger off mental or emotional cyclones which make him unacceptable to himself or to others. Something interrupts the circuit. As one mother of such a child phrased it, his productivity seems to come in "spasms". Even specialists working with the brain-injured fail to understand why they cannot repeat any given behavior consistently. Small wonder, when even the functioning of the normal brain is still not solved. At a major meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in December, 1968, Robert Reinhold reported the top research priority chosen by many of our most eminent scientists internationally:

"Science is beginning to aim its heavy guns at solving what is perhaps the central mystery of life—how the brain functions.

The stakes are high. An understanding of how the nervous system receives, arranges, and evaluates information and translates it into action is likely to bring cures for some of man's most debilitating diseases, including mental disorders."

Since I could find no material on how one should begin a creative drama class with such a group, I began to make my own plan, drawn from watching the children themselves. With the assortment of speech, social and academic problems spotted within that group, any material chosen for them would at first have to make few verbal demands on them. But even more important, I realized that establishing absolute quiet was essential for these childern who rarely listened to each other, or even to their own words. Until some kind of zone for listening with its own special rules was set up, I knew that no creative work, in fact no work of any kind could take root.

Waiting . . . and Listening

And so on that first morning of our creative drama class, I simply stood in front of the group. I waited. I waited with expectancy, but with no sense of blame, waiting for these children who I now knew would respond to no standard kind of discipline. A full three or four minutes inched by before any of them realized I was waiting for and with them; for in this classroom, one voice talked *over* the other, any adult's voice drowned deep in the wash of noise. Waiting quietly, quietly, finally there came one clean moment of silence in which I placed the tom-tom slowly and pointedly on the table-top where all could see it. Then I turned to them.

"Any time we need to be quiet, I'll just stop, and look at the floor—like this—and wait until we're ready."

And this is exactly what we did for most of that class, acting out with the children how to stop—and be quiet. Over

and over and over. The fascination with which the group was willing to rehearse this, time and again, gave away one of their inner secrets. How skillful each of these children had become in controlling the adult world by their impossible behavior! How used they had grown to demanding and receiving the attention they each craved, even at the expense of punishment, by their knowing use of both noise and relentless distractibility! Judged outlaws from the usual classroom, many lived up to their roles as renegades from which society expects no sense of respect for others.

As that class period unwound, the crawling minutes began to march, and finally to run. For a brand new kind of inner control sent up its first sprouts, its first sign of life inside the group. More quickly they noticed how suddenly I would lower my head, looking down, waiting without a word until almost all came to the same, attentive stop. Stragglers soon found their neighbors' elbows jabbing them in the ribs if they did not catch the signal fast enough!

Repeatedly during that first session, Sandy's sharp plea "Kin I play the drum?" brought me back to the look of intense longing on this harried nine-year-old's face. He tried over and over to shout me down, just as he did the classroom teacher. His constant abusiveness to the other children told me that I must not give in to his demands during class. Once the period ended, though, the moment was right, and I handed him the drum. Darting away, he worked for ten disorganized and glorious minutes of mutinous beating in an adjoining alcove, protected from the jealous intrusion of the others who were all assured of their own turns next time. Then Sandy handed the drum back to me, and for the first time that morning, a look of relaxation caressed his face.

The second period was almost a repetition of the first. We rehearsed once more our signal for quiet. And when quiet came, I showed them that a tape recorder had been set up which would help catch everyone's words. The group was awed by the new equipment, some confused, some hysterically excited, unable to focus on anything. I was unrelenting. I stopped the group each time they forgot, waiting until quiet came. A gear suddenly seemed to shift as perceptibly as a new speed on a bicycle . . . and then more moments came when each child could begin to hear. Seated in our semicircle once more, I explained something about primitive tribes—how natives beat out messages in the jungle. Instead of a telephone or a letter, the message is sent by drum beats, by talking drums. Did anyone have a message *he* might like to send on the drum? The rest of that session was equivalent to hanging on to a team of runaway horses, excitement over sending each child's message at fever pitch until each had his turn, several already begging to act out their messages. But always, between turns, the insistence on even momentary but full silence so that we could hear each other's efforts.

At the end of that day, I went home exhausted, even more appreciative of the mammoth task facing the classroom teacher who must work with the brain-damaged every day. There was clearly no one to tell me how to proceed with these children, but just as clearly, an outline must be made for the following day. I was also certain that the outline each

day would be subject to change at any moment in ways far more radical than in teaching creative drama in a standard classroom, because of their completely unpredictable reactions. The group had now fractured into two distinct parts, the abusive, loud and overly active children dominating those with so little self-assurance that several sat in stifled fright during class. Whether demanding the full light of attention either by their uncontrolled noise or by their withdrawal, I sensed in each of them many of the qualities of the fox in Antoine De Saint-Exupéry's classic fable [1] when he speaks to the little prince.

"I cannot play with you," the fox said. "I am not tamed. . . . . If you want a friend, tame me . . ."

Did they need a friend? Were they asking in these terms to be tamed?

I was soon to find out, for entering the room that third day, I noticed instantly a subtle, but definite change in the atmosphere. It was—for a closely-shaved minute . . . almost quiet! Excited bodies waited in the semicircle, but almost like persons bound in a secret conspiracy. An inner tension in the group spelled a seriousness, a supreme holding on to themselves which revealed itself in tightly clenched fingers and shining eyes. They could! They *could* do it! And Sandy, now emerging with real strength as the leader, sat the most rigid of all, scarcely breathing. Like the fox, he sat looking out of the corner of his eye. Was it possible? Now at last while he was both quiet and listening, I could call on him *first*. Instantly he, and the rest of the group, understood what his inner stillness meant . . . that one's quiet brought a cherished premium with it . . . a chance to have a turn first!

From a Story, Into Movement

Follow this transcription of the third class session, and watch for the emergence of the teacher's technique. The sections in italics were inserted after I had studied the transcription made from the tape, thinking back to what I had done, and why, as the class moved along.

TEACHER: Sandy, remember what you asked me last time? You asked "May I . . .?"

SANDY: Oh, *I* know,——I——I——I threw a ball at . . .

TEACHER: But even before that happened you said, "May I act out?"

SANDY (starting to think, instead of allowing his own usual tumbling thoughts to obscure the question he asked the teacher): "Oh— the drums."

TEACHER: You said, "I have a wonderful thought," while you were working with the drums last time. You said, "May I act out my story?"

The teacher repeats Sandy's question exactly as he has asked it, showing him that she has considered his words important. At some future time, after others have begun to hear his questions and comments instead of having them remain submerged in the noisy pandemonium which always engulfs him, Sandy may begin to know the value of what he says.

So this is Sandy's story which he has waited very patiently to tell for two class periods. He has had this story in his mind, and there wasn't time to tell it. This is Sandy's chance today.

SANDY [eagerly]: Shall I tell them what I planned?

He is beginning to *ask* instead of using his former pattern, rushing ahead and then alienating the other children, as well as the teacher who works with him in his academic subjects.

TEACHER: Why don't you tell the story, first, as you thought it up, and then we can plan, and then act it out?

SANDY [promptly]: O.K. . . . Er . . . play like Gordon is the Chief— and— and— Gordon is playing the drum, when he wants some food. Gordon has to beat the drum for about four times, then all the natives come— come out, and stand in front of us. And he tells us and— and— and— we have to go out. And the girls are hidin' and—and— wha— wha— —a lion jumps on a man, and he hurts him, and the other boys kill the lion, and they take it in.

[Stops for a second, flushed with the victory of getting his whole story told in one piece without being interrupted.] How do you like that story?

[Responses and outbursts come from the group, enough to spur him on to tell more.]

Mary Anne's the elephant [imitating one of her sounds] and she comes in, and we have homes, and a village, and Mary Anne comes up [whinnies] and knocks all the houses, and knocks them all down. And— and— then they all start running away, and she knocks down a tree, and knocks down a house, and— and—then some boys killed her. And here comes a giraffe, running real fast. And— and—after that, we cotched her, a giraffe in a trap.

As he tells his story, the teacher never stops him. It is his first told-aloud story to the group. The teacher quietly knows that the hesitations and the blockings will clear up in future tellings if his total product is accepted this time, with appreciation on her part for his fine accomplishment, carrying his story from start to finish, and providing the class with action which they are able to dramatize.

TEACHER: You caught a giraffe in a trap! That is a *really* exciting story!

JUNE: Well— well, I think that Mary Anne should be the giraffe, because she is tall.

TEACHER: A lot of course depends on Mary Anne, and what she would like to be. You can see that there are lots of parts in this play, and Sandy has thought a lot about them. He might ask Mary Anne what she would *like* to be.

The teacher at this point sets in action a basic principle which she will help the children develop ceaselessly—the concept that one *asks* another, rather than dictates.

Before we begin, Sandy, we're going to do something that we haven't tried before. Your story is an excellent one, and it has so many parts to it. But before we all start acting it out, I would like to see how it would feel if we were all moving about in the jungle . . . with *great big movements*. We've pushed all our desks and chairs over to the walls this morning, so we have a lovely, big wide space for acting here. Now, before we go into Sandy's story in a few minutes, I'd like for you all to *close your eyes* just a moment, and *think about which animal you especially liked* that Sandy told you about.

It has become apparent after the first few moments of session one that these easily distracted children cannot think about imaginative material with their eyes open. The teacher helps them blot out visual stimulations for the time being in order to help them better see the inner picture. She will continue this way of helping them "imagine" in many sessions to follow, helping them learn to listen with their eyes closed. She pauses for two or three quiet minutes while the group tries to achieve what is first almost impossible for them . . . the quiet discipline of sitting in concentrated thought with their eyes closed.

Think how your animal would move—and *then how you're going to move.*

PAMELA [breaking in, asking for directions for herself, not the group]

TEACHER: Pamela, we're all going to be different kinds of animals together, first.

[She quickly seats the children in a semicircle near the piano to which she now moves. She tells them that she is going to play some "jungle music", and that each one should listen until he "sees" the jungle with his eyes closed. She improvises a few deep notes and then rough chords on the piano while the now-still group begins to deepen into silence—a listening silence in which each child's eyes are now closed.] [1]

TEACHER: Good! Now everybody open your eyes, and without saying a word to anyone else, move to a spot out here, anywhere in this big room, where you can be alone in the jungle. Spread way, way out . . . *Now* we're ready. This time I'm going to play some elephant music, and I'd like for each of you to show me how an elephant would move, if he were walking by himself in the jungle. Ready? [She gives a full, long minute for the wiggling, excited bodies to become still once more] Begin!

[As she plays, she watches her group carefully, noting the unique way in which each boy or girl moves. She stops the moment she notices the children who have bumped into each other, and who have forgotten that they are playing the parts of animals.]

Very good! Sit right down on the floor where you have stopped. *What kind of feeling do you think an elephant has inside as he moves?*

GORDON [mumbling]: S . . . low.

As Gordon speaks, the teacher realizes even more keenly that these children are not used to listening to each other. Perhaps only one other child heard Gordon's comment. Therefore the teacher repeats his word exactly as he has said it, which she suddenly knows will be a key to their whole learning.

TEACHER: Slow! That's right, Gordon.

And thus having started to lead the group into questioning, I know that we are at last on the way to one of the vital components of creative dramatics.

We Move Into Planning

Every child in the group had entered into the group movement, initiated during the "elephant music"! Even Mary Anne, who is both deaf and aphasic, watched on the edges of the class at first, a Botticelli torrent of cascading blonde curls framing a suddenly attentive face. Then haltingly she joined in, imitating Pamela's steps, a huge leap forward for this child of confused silence. And even though Kirk kept moving long after the others had stopped, he became part of

the others rather than living alone through the painful separate world he always clutched around him. Now that *every* child has shared this first total experience in movement, we are ready at last to center back on one individual child's idea. We can use the opportunity given us by Sandy's story. It offered a skeleton of action and conflict in the telling, the bones of which real drama is made. Our tape recorder was set, and took down the essential phase of *planning* by our band of learners, without which so many experiments in creative drama come to little flower.

TEACHER [carefully choosing those volunteers who have shown the most lively potential for imaginative thinking, so that the first experience in independent planning would be as successful as possible]:

Suppose that Sandy, Gordon, Karen, and Jimmy meet together over here in this corner for a few minutes, and talk about *where Sandy's story is going to begin,* and *who is doing what. Now,* you are going to be the animals in the jungle. Plan what you're going to do. Then put it all together. [They do so, then rejoin the whole group.]

JUNE: C— can we hide?

TEACHER: Tell them what you want them to do, Sandy.

The teacher thus turns over to the small group any "authority" she may have represented to them, making them a self-contained unit able to do their own planning.

SANDY [eagerly taking hold of this responsibility, addressing himself to all the girls]: Hey, can you girls try to find a hiding place?

PAMELA: And think about it—think what you're going to do!

[Pamela by now has picked up a key word for the whole group—"think".]

SANDY: Yes, it has to be in this room.

[He clearly demonstrates that he has the plan for the group in mind—quite a jump from the stage where he was bidding for the approval of only the teacher as he first told his story.]

[He excitedly marches around the room as though planning the action further as he discharges some of his energy by moving]:

Who is the lion? Who is the lion?

[Sandy shows us that in their group planning, they remembered to assign various roles to members of the group.]

June is the lion! OK, June, you jump on Jimmy, OK?

[He indicates with his arm where the village is situated, with mumbled but clear indication of the location.]

TEACHER [to rest of group]: Now, this is what a good stage manager does. A good stage manager, like Sandy, is showing you. He said, "That's the village." He's placing it here, where the drums are.

Some of the most effective teaching of all comes through the children's own self-discovery, and then the sharpening of it through the teacher's calling attention to it. If she works in this way, she does not describe a technique, such as "being a good stage manager" ahead of the moment-of-happening. She waits until the moment the children spontaneously do it on their own initiative for the first time . . . then stands aside somewhat like the narrator in classical French

drama, who informs the audience what the characters are doing while they are in action.

And what is this, Sandy? [She points to an area in the room which he has not indicated to his cast.]

SANDY [immediately, with clear purpose]: That's the jungle, where the animals are.

A question such as this helps him visualize the scene more completely.

TEACHER: Now will you explain the whole plan of what goes on? When the play begins, what happens?

SANDY: There's a stream, and— and— Jimmy hitches a note and he throws it down the stream.

His description indicates that he has gone further in the planning stage when he met with his group in the corner, and that he has changed some details from his original telling of his story, which is a growth in both directions. Therefore we know that his imagination is in gear, and is beginning to be a great asset for him. It is evident, though, that Sandy still needs further help in "setting the scene" for the other children to visualize, so the teacher asks another leading question.

TEACHER: And where is the stream?

SANDY [Clearly indicating a spot at his feet . . . with evident satisfaction over discovering it!]: *Right here!* And as soon as I get the paper from out of the stream, Gordon doesn't want to read it, he puts it down. He wants to set and eat. So we all have to go out and get the food.

TEACHER: And when do the animals come in?

SANDY: As soon as we start hunting. And we're close to them, and then the lion jumps out on us.

The scene has now been clearly enough set so that it is a good time to let the children try it, for they are impatient to begin. Overplanning can kill their desire to try.

TEACHER: All right, now . . . ready? Everyone get the feeling inside of *where you are* and *who you are*. Ready? . . . Begin.

And the imaginary curtain opens on the first playing of Sandy's story, which will grow, and be somewhat different with every playing. Throughout the section of planning just described, I was struck, looking back over the transcription of the tape, with a subtle shift in Sandy's actual thinking process. I was reminded of Piaget's distinction between *directed* and *autistic* thought when he wrote:[3]

Psychoanalysts have been led to distinguish two fundamentally different modes of thinking: directed or intelligent thought, and *undirected* or, as Bleuler proposes to call it, *autistic thought*. Directed thought is conscious, i.e., it pursues an aim which is present to the mind of the thinker, it is intelligent, and it can be communicated by language. Autistic thought is subconscious, which means that the aims it pursues and the problems it tries to solve are not present in consciousness, and it remains strictly individual and incommunicable as such by means of language.

Dating from that day on, when Sandy was given an active part in the planning

of the various scenes we were to dramatize over the next several months, it was apparent that with much encouragement and patient waiting required of both teacher and group, he *could* begin to find language to describe plans and ideas.

Three of the remaining eight showed glimmers of the same kind of promise, but their vocabularies' limitations made the speaking or writing of stories for possible dramatization a painful experience. Something must be done, I determined, to help a love of language germinate without causing the child an additional burden of writing it down. Now it becomes essential for time alone with each child in addition to the creative drama classes.

A Time for Each Child

Following our gathering on several days, I set up my typewriter in an alcove, and while the rest of them worked on other classroom subjects, each child was invited to come one by one to tell me a story, describe an event, or even just to talk. I grandly assured each one that he could now feel like a business executive, dictating to his secretary! Out of this, I began to gain some sense of individual understanding of each child's life: June's charming valuing of her family's Orthodox Jewish feasts; Jimmy's monumental, awed description of the "hole he saw in the sea", the actual volcanic eruption of an island in the Atlantic he witnessed en route to France by ship; Karen's anguished account of helping save her two younger brothers from a fire in their basement. Even Kirk, incapable of anything except the most fragmentary communication, contributed one unforgettable comment which I recorded the day an old pipe overhead throbbed with steam . . . "I don't like that red noise." All offerings by each child were typed by me just as the person dictated them, then read back to each author with slow and grand emphasis. Private smiles flicking over faces on those days attested to *the importance of a child's own material emerging from his own experience,*[4] most of which would never have come to light if the classroom teacher had held them to the former goal of trying to write out the stories themselves in orderly, clean, and unsmudged "compositions."

Although we sometimes used a tape-recorder for story-telling to give the children the experience of hearing their own voices, I was struck by their far keener preference for dictating a story to a live person. They thrived on the extra assurance gained from a human being, and not a machine, who could accept their words back unedited, intact, and without comment *until they were read back to the child.* Then I would later point out either one word or perhaps even an idea that I liked particularly. Only the positive was emphasized, never a correction or criticism was given. And in this way, the speaker's filmy self-confidence soared from session to session so that he tried again—and again with pleasure! We were having fun—a quality almost totally missing from some of these small lives. We seemed to be working backwards in many ways. I found, for example, that somehow these children of failure could learn to love language and the way it went together if I never tried to "teach" them anything ahead of their discovery, but instead waited until a child actually *produced* an unexpected word or a sentence. Then I stopped the class immediately to point

out what he had just contributed to our surprised flock.

Remembering the brilliant illumination which Hughes Mearns focused on experimental writing at Lincoln and Horace Mann schools in New York [5], I began waiting more and more consciously for the emerging of each new word in class, whether it came from our dramatizations, from the discussions, or from their dictated stories. I would then start the following day by writing the new word on the blackboard in big, important letters. Out of their dramatization, for instance, June suddenly used the word *amazed* for the first time one day to describe the reaction of a character who had just been played by Jimmy.

"June just gave us another word for our list!" I exclaimed, referring to the growing line-up of new words they had discovered in the last week. "These are *your* words you've all given us—slash, jolly, crash through, unusual, miniature, comparison, and amazed." And I, not the least of any of them, was *equally* amazed as their glowing faces told me that they, too, were proud of their growing facility with language.

Some days were out of joint, even with the day immediately preceding it—days on which unaccountably the group would split apart; days on which their new-found interest in the world of words suddenly atrophied; days on which some kind of electricity sparked off the old lashing out at each other. It was essential to keep a cluster of ideas in reserve for such times, turning back always to some new experience which had a strong appeal to at least one of the senses, and which allowed both for fresh exploration and for movement. On one of these days late in the year, for the first time since our creative drama work had begun, neither Kirk nor Mary Anne, those hardest-of-all-to-reach children, withdrew from the physical touch of my hand. This signaled one of the only mornings of the entire year when Kirk seemed totally with us, when a mental chloroform seemed to have evaporated from this complex child. The old look of wildness, the kind of animal-shy caution of being struck, left Mary Anne's face, never to return for the rest of the year in our group. She worked to transfer the sound she could not hear, but the vibrations she could *feel* from a drum onto the endless horizon of paper on which she painted. And so it was, that shining morning, that the fox's words to the little prince seem to me eloquently to describe the growing closeness I now began to feel in our band of learners—"you will sit a little closer to me, every day." Wordlessly we could feel it taking place —not only a greater sense of physical, but of emotional closeness.

As language developed, and as the semester spun on, I began to find something of utter fascination to me: although there had been no attempt whatsoever to correct their mistakes, some of the former severe speech blockings and repetitions in several of the group had all but disappeared. There appeared no more "wha . . . wha's" or "Ummmmmmmmmmmmm's" to start a sentence, and no more refusals from seven of our children to join in the telling of stories. In addition, June, Gordon, Karen, and Sandy unconsciously began to master the true story-teller's art of emphasis in their telling-aloud. In three of them, a truly dramatic quality able to hold the hearer's attention was beginning to come clear.

Teaching Technique: We Are Ready

So many things demanded mastering up until now for each child both in his inner and outer control that I had purposely avoided instructions for any child which would make him fight against continuing the dictated stories. But one brisk April day, I now decided the time had come when we would devote the whole class time to try to help each child *hear* himself make a sentence. Before each began, I told them of the trick taught us at speech school. When one wanted to end a sentence, I explained, "close your mouth immediately", for otherwise what we always referred to as the "vocalized pause"—the long drawn-out "and" or the "aaaaaaaaa" which makes for the marathon sentence—was sure to slip out. Gordon looked especially serious when I told him about this new idea, just before he began to dictate. He nodded, waiting for a very long minute in which I could almost hear him silently incorporate this into his thinking. I now knew that he, like the others, had to *hear* the speech aloud, and to say it aloud, sometimes even moving through acting it out, before he could master the control of writing it on paper himself. This was true even with someone acting as his amanuensis.

Gordon's dictated story that day showed me that he now had hold of a powerful bit of learning—the knowledge of how to conceive, and then to speak, complete, effective sentences, no longer the fragmented bits which formerly dissolved into unfinished thoughts when he conversed. Rich satisfaction showed in the relished emphasis he gave the final word each time.

But even more remarkable, Gordon proved the following day that he was now able to transfer his newly-learned technique of sentence-making into dramatized form, thinking on his feet to produce the high point in creative dramatization of the whole year. The class was based on magazine pictures which I had asked the group to select, showing any persons who might suggest a story that could be built around them. The group was divided into pairs, each to work out an idea emerging from a picture which June had clipped from *Life* magazine, showing two men talking across a desk. We all agreed that the two men could be talking about "anything in the world." Five minutes raced past, a planning period with each couple busily working in a separate part of the room. When we reassembled, Gordon's and Sandy's playing of their scene was greeted by such genuine cheers and clapping that we could all recognize a new level of dramatization onto which we had moved, new in its finish, new in its inventiveness. Our tape recorder had not been connected during the first playing, so we asked the boys to give their scene a second time. The following transcription benefits from the earlier dramatization, which was in a sense a rehearsal for the second presentation. It also illustrates the ability of both boys almost instantly to add to or change the original playing . . . a further growth in their thinking, a positive demonstration of "how the nervous system receives, arranges, and evaluates information and translates it into action," that top research priority for many of our world's distinguished scientists cited earlier.

The scene begins with Gordon seated behind a desk, addressing an imaginary person who is just leaving his office.

GORDON Well, Mrs. Walker, I'll see you shortly.

[Sandy enters and sits in the chair opposite him on the other side of the desk.]

Hi, how are you today, Mr. Ragin? I've just finished looking at a house, and I think you would like it. It has ten rooms, a two-car garage with doors, a fan, a big cellar, a big attic—and you have to pay for the—tell me, how do you like it?

SANDY [pretending to study some blueprints on the desk]: Aw, I don't think this is a very good idea. I can't read this.

GORDON: Oh-h . . . here, your house is a very big one. It has ten rooms, three big bathrooms, two-car garage, a big cellar, and I have it for—*you*—twelve thousand dollars.

SANDY: When do I pay you?

GORDON: I will take part money down. A hundred dollars down.

SANDY: I'll write a check.

GORDON [handing him an imaginary pen]: Here, write it.

SANDY: I'll put my name and address down. [The imaginary pen doesn't seem to write.] I'll shake it first.

GORDON: Er—your house should be up in about six months, for . . . three hundred dollars per week. Three hundred dollars per week have to get paid, you know. When would you like to have it up? March? . . . September?

SANDY: No, er . . . May, next May.

GORDON: Next May . . . OK [pretends telephone is ringing, making sounds for it.] Ring— ring! [pantomimes picking up receiver.] . . . Er, Joe? [aside to Sandy.] Joe's not down yet. [speaking back into phone.] I want a house stuck up on lot A3 . . . Put her down in eighty, that's all right. I think that would be all right. I'll be down when I get a chance— OK? [hangs up.] I think your house ought to be up pretty soon.

SANDY: Barn? . . . Barn?

GORDON: No, no barn. Your house ought to be . . . [pointing to imaginary map on desk.]—Go up this street to the third stop sign, turn left, turn on the next block, the next right turn—it's only two houses, and that will be *your house*. [speaking to imaginary person who has just entered and handed him something] Here's—here, Joe, here are your plans. [turns back to Sandy.] And you're going to have a *nice spot*. Don't cut down too many trees, remember. You want a *nice house*. Oh, er, see you . . .

[Sandy gets up and exits.]

GORDON [making sound of phone ringing once more] Ding, ding, ding . . . rrrrrrrrrring, rrrrrrrrrring, rrring! [He pantomimes picking up phone again.] I just sold a nice house.

[It is the end of the scene, and a wild burst of applause comes from the audience, with whistles and shouts.]

Their enthusiasm was so real that I gave the group a marked chance to comment on why they had enjoyed the scene so much. With new perception, Karen volunteered, "They did it just like real men would do it. And they said it just like a real man would say it—well, just like a grown-up man would talk to another man, and the man would say it to him. And they acted like—*not like children!* Not like babies!"

Sincere and unsolicited praise from another member of the group amounted to a critical acknowledgment of the more mature level on which the two boys were acting. To me, the most exciting change

of all had come in Sandy's ability to let Gordon take over the main role in the scene. He then could understand how inventive Gordon had grown in his unexpected additions of new details between the first and second playing of the scene: having the phone ring, introducing imaginary characters coming in and out of the office, and pointing out the exact location of the house on an imaginary map. By looking at Sandy's mile-wide smile, one could observe a new kind of satisfaction emerging from this boy who formerly had enjoyed himself only as the star of a scene. Now he was beginning to participate in one of the most astounding of all human encounters—to share, rather than to dominate and control. And then to be singled out by another child in the class, and commended for the reality of what had taken place. As Karen had testified, "They did it just like real men would do it."

Looking Back— And Ahead

A long, careful weighing of what we have each covered in a teaching year is of matchless value in one's own learning. Studying the records not only of our group experience with the brain-damaged, but of my work with individual brain-injured children whether privately, in a hospital, or in a rehabilitation center brings me to an undeniable conclusion. We are completely justified in the use of creative drama with those who are already so academically adrift. Floating everlastingly in too many scholastic demands, the brain-damaged child is *not* swept into further failure by taking time away from his academic subjects when he joins a creative dramatics class. Rather, through the joyous release he can gain in this totally new experience, he is borne on a strong but gentle tide into the safe harbor of his own amazing ideas, a mooring through which he can finally come to know more of himself.

WITH THE BRAIN-DAMAGED CHILD, WE CAN USE CREATIVE DRAMATICS:

1. to enable him first to learn the meaning of listening, and of quiet.

2. to stimulate all his senses, which in turn helps open new pathways to learning.

3. to assist him in thinking clearly, in remembering, and in disciplining his thinking in an orderly sequence.

4. to help him hear and gain respect for his own ideas by quoting back to him his exact words *either written or spoken.*

5. to encourage him in breaking through to build his own language, both verbal and non-verbal.

While these five goals are realistically reachable by the brain-injured, they are equally important for *all* children. If followed consistently, unshakably, and with great belief in the child's ultimate ability to give of himself, no matter how discouraging the beginning may seem, the teacher will virtually see the desert bloom. It would almost seem as though Jacob Glatstein might have envisioned this kind of human being when he wrote:[6]

Don't try to match yourself
against the entire night.
Too much knowledge will crush you . . .

Choose a crumb of night for yourself,
be small.
live inside it without fear,
pulling a cover of dreams
up over your head.

The brain-damaged child, almost more than anything, needs to learn of his whole life "to live inside it without fear" with his "cover of dreams" to strengthen him. Used in its most responsible way, creative drama offers the hope of helping such a child formulate and act out his creative ideas—the dreams which can later fortify him in the real world. Used in its most responsible way, creative drama offers this same hope to every child, whether damaged or whole.

[1] *New York Times*, December 30, 1968, p. 1.
[2] Antoine De Saint-Exupéry. *The Little Prince*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1943).
[3] See Weiner and Lidstone. *Creative Movement for Children* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1969) for a variety of other excellent ways to initiate creative movement in the classroom.
[4] Piaget, Jean. *The Language and Thought of the Child* (New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1955).
[5] See "Cats for Free" in Geraldine Siks's *Children's Literature for Dramatization* (New York: Harper, 1964), p. 84-85, a story dictated to Emily Gillies by an eight-year-old.
[6] Mearns, Hughes, *Creative Power: The Education of Youth in the Creative Arts*. (New York: Dover, 1958).
[7] "Night" by Jacob Glatstein from *The Selected Poems of Jacob Glatstein* (translated from the Yiddish by Ruth Whitman). (New York: October House, Inc., 1972).

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Except for the children pictured in photographs, the name of each student mentioned in the manuscript is fictionalized. Only the name of each is imaginary, however, for every child described is a very real person.